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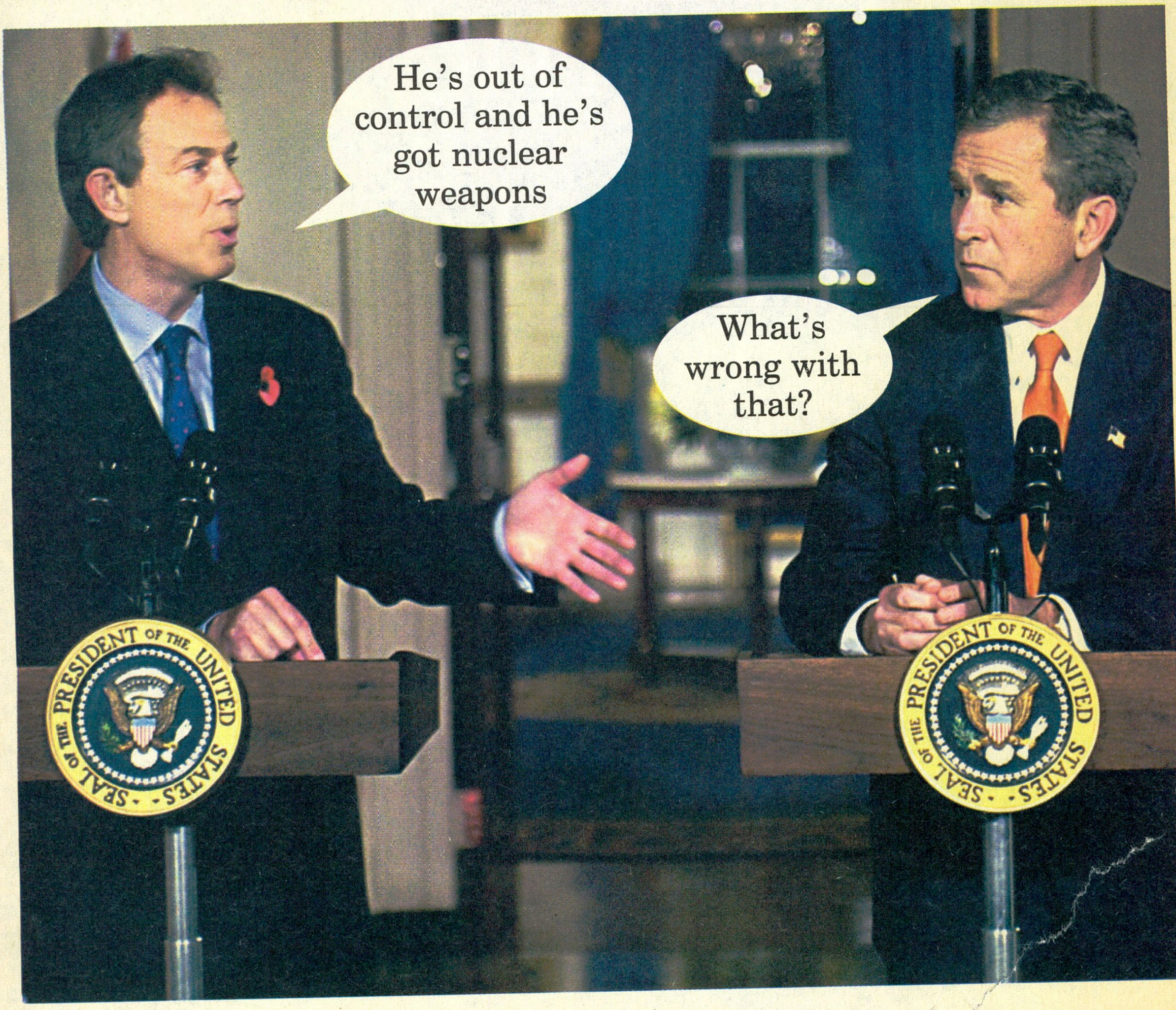
PRIVATE EYE

WAR ON SADDAM



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Gnome

AS Chairman of BG, British Gnomoleum, Britain's leading producer of petrol, I have regretfully decided to award myself a pay increase of £7 billion, bringing my take home pay to £33 billion a week.

Needless to say, small-minded critics have been quick to criticise this modest recognition of my contribution to BG, but I would like to point out to them that there is one irrefutable argument for such a salary increase. Namely, that owing to the fact that I have just put petrol prices up, I now need a considerably enlarged increment to buy the petrol to put in all my cars.

E. Strobes
pp Lord Browngnome
The Old Forecourt
Little Shame
Bucks

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ABC

The Bush telegraph!

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IN THE TEAROOM

THERE have been few takers so far for George Galloway and Tam Dalyell's spirited wheeze to unseat Tony Blair and install Gordon Brown in his place. But the very fact that the unthinkable is no longer unsayable prompts thoughts of an Easter reshuffle. Time, as it were, to move the government into its "third phase".

But whom to sack? Despite a fumbling performance on the international stage, the foreign secretary Jack Straw is, at least, 100 percent loyal. Foolish then to get rid of him. And hypocritical too. Straw was, after all, the author of that handgun ban – identified by the prime minister in his recent seminar at the LSE as one of the great achievements of "new" Labour in office.

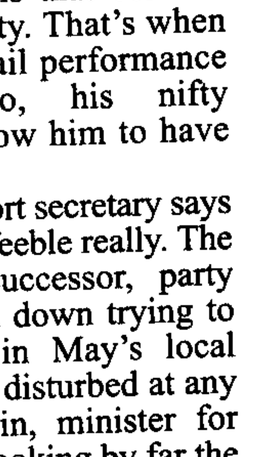
Estelle Morris and Alan Milburn have dug themselves into their respective departments of education and health and are promising wonderful news to come. Though both seem certain to disappoint in the longer term, now is too soon to move them. And Robin Cook – generally a good candidate for the chop – is in the middle of a programme of parliamentary reform. Tricky to interrupt the process without looking even more like a control freak.

Which leaves Margaret Beckett at environment and rural affairs – but who'd notice if she stayed or went? So the only high-profile sacking that would send any meaningful signal at all would be that of transport secretary Stephen Byers. Byers knows this. That is why, despite no longer enjoying the services of Jo Moore, he's been chumming up to the media in the past week, even though he'd been dodging them for months. Byers' pitch to Downing Street is that come 6 June he'll be an asset not a liability. That's when the next "improved" figures on rail performance come out, and, hey presto, his nifty "benchmarking" exercise will show him to have got the trains running on time.

Like everything else the transport secretary says and does, that's cunning, but a bit feeble really. The problem is that his obvious successor, party chairman Charles Clarke, is head down trying to save Labour from humiliation in May's local council elections and must not be disturbed at any cost. There is though Peter Hain, minister for Europe, and each day, some say, looking by far the most impressive member of the team. In fact, the smart money has him eventually either as Gordon Brown's chancellor, or even as PM himself. Hain for Byers… why not?

'Urquhart'

Court Circular



PRINCE Charles may have lavished praise on Mummy's devotion to duty over the last 50 years in his St Brides speech to hacks last week, but it has done little to alleviate the coolness between Brenda's senior flunkeys and St James's Palace.

The latest cause of friction has been the content of the Queen's Commonwealth Day message which – generally ignored in Britain, much to Brenda's regret – is largely her own work.

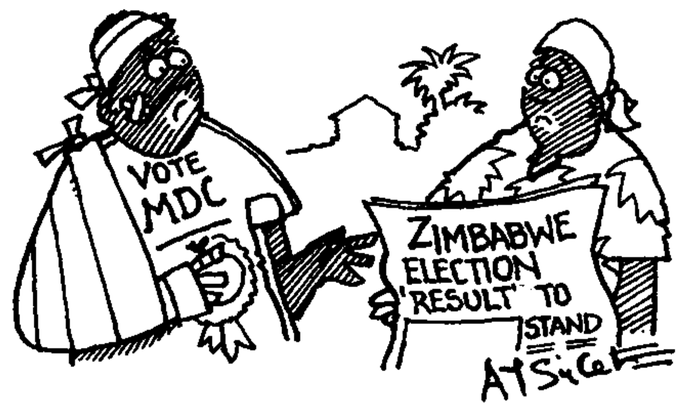
Charles, annoyed about the Commonwealth's unwillingness to seriously address the Zimbabwe problem during the recent heads of government meeting (CHOGM) in Australia, had been pressing Brenda to admit that all in her beloved Commonwealth garden wasn't rosy. The palace responded that getting the Queen to single out member countries wasn't her style – even though she did in the end spend a lot of time praising South Africa.

Downing Street, also annoyed by the CHOGM's Zimbabwe fudge, pointed out to Charles's office that responsibility for advising the Queen on the message lay with the Commonwealth secretariat, led by secretary-general Don McKinnon – a prime architect of the fudge!

In the end Brenda sternly reminded the Commonwealth of its duty to "live together as neighbours... recognising that we have duties as well as rights". Just the kind of stuff to make Mugabe sit up and take notice.

But Charles's day may not be that far off. Preliminary work has begun at Buckingham Palace to examine how Brenda might scale down her duties, patronages and presidencies during the four years leading up to her 80th birthday in 2006. The palace is aware that the celebrations surrounding that birthday will throw up some awkward questions about an octogenerian's suitability to carry on as head of state. Pity, though, no one has yet been brave enough to tell Brenda what they're up to!

'Flunkey'



"We got beaten"

HOPEFULLY the Nigerian observers who have declared Zimbabwe's election legitimate are not judging Robert Mugabe's regime by the standards of their own country.

In the splendid democracy that is Nigeria, a woman is about to be stoned to death for bearing a child out of wedlock, soldiers burn whole villages with impunity, the justice minister was gunned down in his own home in December and no one has been caught yet, the police go on strike and most of the population live on less than a pound a day despite living in one of the world's biggest oil producing countries.

It makes Zimbabwe look almost appealing.

LAST Thursday's *Daily Express* was due to splash on the news that "fat cat" Lord Browne, boss of BP, had collected a £1.1m pay rise despite a fall in profits. By the time the paper appeared, however, the story had been relegated to page six.

No doubt this coyness was wholly unrelated to a deal done by Dirty Desmond with the oil giant to have his titles displayed more prominently than the rest in its service stations.

NEWS

GARY HART, the man whose Land-Rover left a motorway bridge and careered into the path of a train, has started a long prison sentence for his part in the accident at Great Heck, Teesside, that killed 11 people. But little progress has been made to correct the real reason for the disaster: the lack of protection of roads near railway lines.

The health and safety commission published a report at the end of February estimating that an accident like the one at Great Heck would only happen once every 300 years. *Whoops!* Less than a week later van driver John Fletcher was killed when his vehicle crashed on to a railway line and was a hit by a passenger train near Nocton, Lincs.

The authorities were just absorbing the consequences of this when – *whoops!* – another car was left teetering over a railway line after veering off a bridge in Berwick. A spokesman for the health and safety executive (HSE) assured the *Eye* that both accidents fell easily within the range suggested by the commission's report.

The *Eye* asked whether, since the Great Heck accident, a single barrier had been built anywhere in the country to keep vehicles off railway lines. The spokesman replied: "I don't know." He promised to try to find out and get back with a more helpful answer, but hasn't yet managed to do so.

WHILE Metropolitan police commissioner John Stevens was preparing his rant about the damage done to the criminal justice system by defence lawyers, his own lawyers were involved in another embarrassing legal tussle.

Eye 1045 set out the grim story of the permanent physical damage done to 16-year-old John Wilson by police officers in Trafalgar Square in 1996. Somehow the combined intelligence of the Metropolitan police has not been able to identify the officer who smashed John over the head with his riot shield – nor any other of the 25 police in the same group.

Backed by his mother Susan, John sued the police and met every possible obstruction. Finally, after a detailed hearing, Mr Justice Morland decided that John had been injured by a "deliberate assault" from the police and was entitled to damages. Incredibly, the police appealed. Even more incredibly, the right to appeal was supported in the court of appeal by Lord Justice Laws.

The appeal has now been heard, and a strange thing happened at the hearing. After hearing the police lawyers, the judges decided at once that the police case was so weak there was no point in even hearing from John Wilson's lawyers. So now the only matter to be decided is how much the police (ie taxpayers) have to fork out.

"It'll be oil over by Christmas"

THE government's obsession with performance targets and the achievement of "excellence" was probably responsible for the "self-assessment" exercise carried out recently by the National Probation Directorate.

The exercise was based on the much-vaunted "European Excellence Model" for public sector organisations. And in a circular just after Christmas, the directorate reported that "all 43 component parts of the national probation service completed their self-assessments by the agreed timetable". The scores for excellence were included in an annexe. The highest score (Gwent) was 320 points. Bottom of the league by a long way with a paltry 100 points was… the national directorate! The National Association of Probation Officers (NAPO) has inspired a rather impertinent parliamentary question asking how the performance and efficiency of the national directorate is measured.

CONSIGNIA, formerly the post office, is making some serious cutbacks as part of its £1.2bn efficiency savings programme.

Employees of the property holdings division in Glasgow were told last month of a review of "internal plant displays". Existing plant displays are to be dismantled and replaced with a reduced number of pot plants. Bereft staff were told: "This action is being taken due to the difficult financial position Consignia plc now finds itself in." Staff are allowed to keep personal plants provided they do not compromise health and safety, and it is recommended that they mark them with an identification sticker so that they are not taken away by mistake.

Street Of Shame

***SUNDAY People* editor Neil "Wolfman" Wallis has been basking in his legal triumph over the anonymous bonking footballer, giving countless radio and TV interviews portraying himself as the heroic champion of investigative journalism.**

But this historic victory for the public's right to read about soccer stars' sex-lives scarcely cancels out the many major blots on Wallis's copybook which have been highlighted in the *Eye* recently, such as the splash based on phoney Bulger case documents, or the nude paparazzi photos of Sara Cox on her honeymoon. (Wallis, incidentally and ludicrously, sits on the PCC's code-of-conduct committee.)

People hacks have an interesting theory about the Wolfman's increasingly frantic efforts to raise his media profile: with the pisspoor rag's circulation in freefall, they reckon Wallis is convinced Trinity Mirror won't dare fire him if he can become a "celebrity editor". There's only one flaw in this reasoning: even Trinity Mirror's dozy bosses must have noticed that the paper's sales drop yet further every time its half-witted editor appears on TV.

FRIENDS of Kelvin Mackenzie are increasingly worried he may be coming down with Alzheimer's, following his article in the *Guardian* last week reminiscing about his glorious reign at the *Sun*.

As Kelvin recalled, while the paper was already facing libel writs from Elton John for claiming (falsely) that he'd had sex with teenage rent boys, it then compounded the offence. "One of the *Sun*'s finest had come up with an absolute belter: the story was that Elton was having difficulty sleeping at night because of the barking from guard dogs that patrolled the perimeter of his mansion outside London. So he had decided to have the voiceboxes of the dogs removed…"

Pure fiction, of course. So why was it printed? Macfrenzy blames it all on the reporter and news editor, who promised that the story had been thoroughly checked and failed to warn him that a hack at the gates of Elton's mansion could hear barking. But those who were there on the day remember it quite differently.

Senior *Sun* hack John Askill had not originally filed the story but merely sent a memo to the newsdesk following a conversation with a shaky informant. The following Sunday, duty news editor Nick Ferrari made the mistake of mentioning the memo to Mackenzie. (Older and wiser heads knew that one should never show Kelvin anything that hadn't been stood up.) With nothing else to splash on, and despite Elton John's libel case over the rent boys, Mackenzie decided this was the Big One and ordered Askill to file it.

This threw the picture desk into confusion as deputy picture editor Glen Goody had no photos to go with the report. He was promptly bollocked at full volume like a child who has forgotten his sports kit: "What the *fuck* have you been doing all day? Eh? Eh!"

Shortly after 6pm, night news editor Alan Watkins arrived and asked one of the day-shift if anyone had actually gone to Elton's mansion. The man said he didn't know, so Watkins immediately dispatched a casual reporter, who rang back from outside the residence to say that he could clearly hear barking. This information was passed to Kelvin – but he decided to run the story nevertheless.

No doubt the financial services authority (FSA) will want to look into Kelvin's sudden amnesia, in case it is the first sign of a more serious degeneration of the brain which would render him unfit to continue as chairman and chief executive of the Wireless Group plc.

THIS IN-GER-LAND!

"England's impressive left-back is determined to be Kung-Fu fighting fit for the World Cup in Japan. [Ashley] Cole has taken to a bizarre form of inspiration and education… He has been learning Japanese by watching subtitled Jackie Chan and Bruce Lee movies… 'Maybe watching these films will help prepare me for Japan…'"

— *The* Sun, *2 March 2002.*

CONGRATULATIONS to the *Daily Mail* for its sensational exclusive revelation that drug-dealers sell, er, drugs.

The main thrust of last Friday's "terrifying *Mail* investigation" was that hard drugs are now peddled in "some of Britain's most desirable areas". As the paper explained: "We sent six young female reporters out into middle-class areas all over the country to find out how easy it is to buy heroin in places you would least expect to find it." It claimed that the hackettes had simply been "approached" by helpful dealers while sitting on a park bench in Oxford or strolling through the Georgian centre of Bath.

But this wasn't quite the message conveyed by hackette Carmen Bruegmann in the instructions she sent out a few days earlier to local news agencies who had been recruited to provide undercover reporters for her investigation:

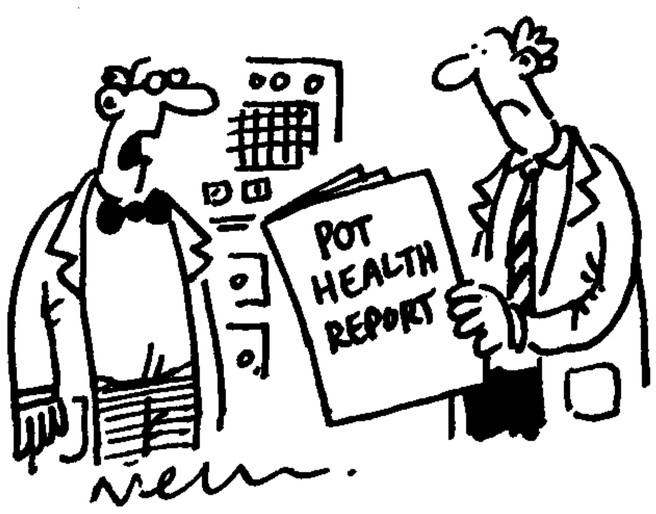
"1. Look the part. Unkempt and unclean helps. Casual clothes (preferably unwashed for a while). Heroin chic is best.

"2. Research your 'sources'. Do this the night before buying. Simply walk down town and visit your local nightclubs and pubs with 'rough' reputations. Discreetly ask 'Do you know where I can score?' or 'Can you get any gear around here?' Approach people who look like smackheads. They usually look on edge, drawn and desperate."

Strangely, there was no mention in her 2,300-word piece of deliberately seeking out "rough" pubs and clubs, which claimed that the hackettes had visited only places that seem "the epitome of respectability and tranquility". Shome mishtake, shurely?

***NEWS of the Screws* editor Rebekah Wade, a bosom buddy of Cherie Blair, is producing a more female-friendly organ than her predecessors. That, at least, is the line successfully peddled by the Wapping spin machine.**

A recent *Observer* profile, for instance, emphasised Rebekah's dislike of the "tabloid obsession with nudity: she thinks Page Three girls put off women readers". How odd, then, that the Mothering Sunday edition of the new, nipple-free *Screws* included a 12-page supplement featuring pictures of almost all the female celebs one has ever heard of. Some were posing happily, others had clearly been caught unawares by paparazzi – but every single one was topless.



"If you can remember the cannabis research, you weren't there"

RICHARD Desmond is so desperate to hold on to what remains of his drooping smut organs that two weeks ago he despatched managing director Martin "Mad Dog" Ellice to the offices of Fastmag, the company which delivers mags to the wholesale houses.

Fastmag distributes not only Dirty Des's porn titles and *OK!* but also several top-shelf magazine from Sapphire MultiMedia, the rival company recently launched by Des's former pornographer-in-chief Deric "Mr Wiggy" Botham. Adopting his most menacing expression, Ellice strolled into their offices with an ultimatum: either stop distributing Botham's mags or we'll take our *OK!* business elsewhere.

Alas! Desmond's empire doesn't have as much clout as it thinks – especially as sales of *OK!* and the *Express* titles dwindle. Fastmag decided that despite the obvious loss of revenue it couldn't let this posturing rottweiler bully them into breaking legitimate business agreements.

So now Dirty Des has to find a new *OK!* distributor. He has upset so many people, however, that it may be no easy task. Perhaps *OK!* staff can distribute it in their spare time.

MEANWHILE, back on the legal front, Dirty Des's court battle against Botham and Co is shaping up nicely. As the *Eye* revealed last month, one of the defendants, Andre Tomas, is a refugee from East Germany who claims that Dirty Des yelled "Heil Hitler" and "I hate fucking Germans" whenever he saw him. Our piece aroused particular interest in the offices of Commerzbank, the German bank which lent Des the money to buy the Express Group.

Terrified of offending his main financial backer, Desmond's lawyers offered to drop all litigation against Tomas and pay him a substantial out-of-court sum if he'd sign a statement that Des had never said "all Germans are fucking Nazis". Tomas replied that he would see them in court. His account of Des's rantings is backed by affidavits from no fewer than 14 witnesses.

IN THE *Daily Express*'s new TV advertising campaign, a childlike voice can be heard saying "Express Delivery!" It belongs to none other than Robert Desmond, 11-year-old son of Dirty Des.

The commercials were recorded in the studio of the Fantasy Channel, Des's satellite-porn operation. We trust that all sexual props, Asian babes and horny housewives were removed for the duration

HOW curious that the *Independent on Sunday* has suddenly decided to join the crusade to ban fox-hunting. Even more curiously, its forthright leader on the subject appeared just two days after its daily sister-paper, the *Indie*, ran its fiercest denunciation yet of any attempt to outlaw hunting.

The *Sindie*'s conversion caused great rejoicing at the offices of the RSPCA, leading anti-hunt campaigners – whose chief executive Peter Davies is, by happy coincidence, the father of new *Sindie* editor Tristan Davies.

GUESTS at a moving memorial exhibition of cartoons by the late Sophie Dixon held in Soho last week were amazed to read a caption posted by her family underneath a collection of work she had contributed to the *Evening Standard* Magazine: "Shame about Max Hastings being such an arsehole in the end."

Ms Dixon had apparently been sacked by Hastings after offending the Knightsbridge grocer Mohamed Fayed with a cartoon depicting an Arab sheikh and his entourage emerging from a limo outside Harrods saying: "You open up for us or I say to you you're Al Fayed!"

One woman and her dog: Clarissa Dickson Wright at Chatsworth House in Derbyshire (BBC2, 4.20 pm)

Daily Telegraph

THE reign of terror of new *Evening Standard* editor Veronica Wadley has claimed another victim.

Last November cartoonist Ken Pyne won the Cartoon Art Trust's strip cartoonist of the year award for his *Standard* cartoon strip London Life, a fact which was trumpeted in the *Standard's* own Londoner's Diary. Despite this prestigious award Wadley has decided to get rid of Pyne, although he was not even given the courtesy of a letter of explanation. The first he knew of his sacking was when he received a phone call from the paper asking where they should return his cartoon originals.

Pyne wrote to Wadley asking why he was given the chop, but two weeks later has still not received the courtesy of a reply.

O·B·N

This year ill-health keeps the Queen Mother at home. But her spirit – gutsy, indomitable, phlegmatic and filled with a passionate love of life – will fill every last square inch of the magnificent natural amphitheatre that provides the setting for the greatest race meeting in the world.

PETER OBORNE (on the Cheltenham race meeting)
Evening Standard

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

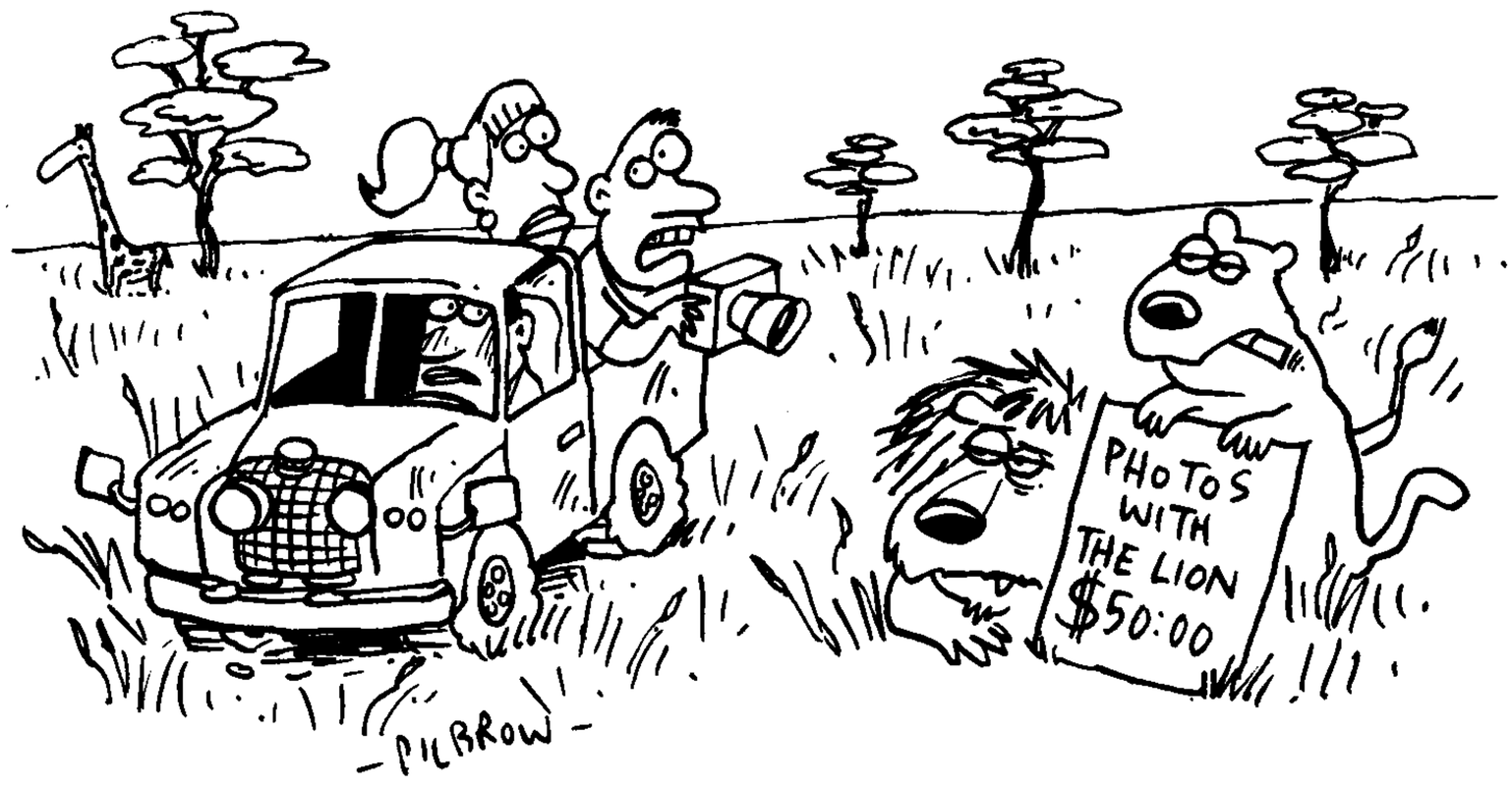
JOHNSTON Press's £560m buy-out of Regional Independent Media is conveniently timed for RIM boss Chris Oakley (*Eyes passim*) – it coincides with a ballot on industrial action by hacks at RIM's flagship *Yorkshire Post* in Leeds.

Journalists want the company to agree to talks about a pay structure, with grades based on seniority and experience. Hardly a revolutionary idea, but RIM chief executive Oakley refuses even to discuss it – hence the ballot. Oakley's case has hardly been helped by RIM ads for advertising staff in the *Yorkshire Post*, which promise "a comprehensive grading structure which recognises experience within the industry".

By 12 April, however, the truculent hacks will be Johnston's problem, not Oakley's. He will have no need to worry about a graded career structure, either, as he is personally trousering an estimated £4.5m from the sale.

JOHN MAJOR's recent purchase of a £3m penthouse flat in Battersea was deemed worthy of an entire page three spread in the *Sunday Times* on 10 March. But although the article was accompanied by a colour photograph of the riverside development, the newspaper showed admirable discretion in refusing to reveal the exact address of the former PM's new pad.

Major's private secretary Arabella Warburton. was quoted asking that the precise address should remain confidential: "He may be in the business where people take pot shots. Other people in the building are not." Anyone wishing to take pot shots, however, need only turn to page 22 of the paper's *Home* Section, where the identical colour photograph of "Chelsea Bridge Wharf" is reprinted, complete with a map showing how to get there.



"Do you think they're getting used to all the tourists?"

ANY mystery about the "whispering campaign" to rid the Commons of standards commissioner Elizabeth Filkin vanishes almost as soon as you read her reports.

Mrs Filkin was deeply unpopular with Scottish Labour MPs ever since her inquiry in 1999 into allegations made against two MPs: John Reid, now Northern Ireland secretary, and John Maxton.

The allegation was that both men had used their office costs allowance, which is strictly limited to parliamentary work, to pay Labour party workers in the Scottish parliamentary elections of that year.

In Mr Reid's case, the allegation was that he had, at taxpayers' expense, employed his son Kevin. For some reason such nepotism is not in itself in breach of the parliamentary rules. Mrs Filkin investigated these complaints with the utmost diligence and patience. With the help of evidence from the former general secretary of the Scottish Labour party, Alex Rowley, she decided on the balance of probabilities that both MPs had paid their researchers out of their office cost allowance for at least some of the time they had been working full-time for the Labour party. Such use of MPs' office cost allowance for party purposes was in blatant breach of the rules.

Mrs Filkin upheld both complaints and sent her findings back to the standards and privileges committee. Her investigations, she said, had been sullied by the reaction of both MPs to the allegations. Dr Reid's remarks to the general secretary of his Scottish Labour party were, she concluded, "an attempt to frustrate my investigations". As for Mr Maxton, his "repeated approaches have far exceeded, both in their frequency and tone, what I would have expected of a senior member of parliament. Indeed I have not encountered such behaviour on this scale by a member of parliament in any other investigation I have carried out."

Mrs Filkin's report drove the MPs on the standards and privileges committee into an anxious huddle. Eventually, in a confused and muddled response, they rejected her conclusions. Their reasons were based on a very generous interpretation of the burden of proof required to uphold the allegations.

But the MPs did strongly criticise James Goudie QC, Dr Reid's barrister, who had mounted an insulting attack on Mrs Filkin. (Mr Goudie is a prominent member of lord chancellor Derry Irvine's chambers.) And the committee also extracted an apology from Mr Maxton. What cannot be doubted is that Mrs Filkin's investigation and utterly justifiable findings made her very bitter enemies among the many influential friends of Dr Reid and Mr Maxton.

PS: The hazards involved in MPs employing their sons were dramatically revealed recently when Malcom Bell, 20, the son of Stuart Bell MP, was sent to a young offenders' institution for 60 days after he had been convicted of stealing cheques from his father's fellow MPs while working for his father as a researcher in the Commons. As reported in the last *Eye*, Mr Bell was the leading advocate of his friend, Mr Philip Mawer, general secretary of the synod of the Church of England, to take as parliamentary standards commissioner when Mrs Filkin was not offered her job back.

REVEREND Blair's love affair with Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi has led to a joint initiative to restrict workers' rights in favour of yet more "economic liberalisation".

Last month Blair was joined by leftie turned Blairite Peter Hain, the Europe minister, in drafting a communique for discussion at the Italian summit which envisages turning the clock being on employment rights. This is much to the chagrin of the French and Germans, some of whom now want "new" Labour expelled from the Socialist International and the European Socialist Group in Brussels.

The comrades back in Britain take an even dimmer view of Blair's dubious new alliance with the European far right. The GMB union has just ordered a job lot of new T shirts for members with the slogan "Proud to be Wreckers" across the front.

THE passion and sincerity of chancellor Gordon Brown's savage Commons attack on the uncompetitive record of the big banks made the front pages on 15 March and was widely cheered by backbench Labour MPs. But wait. what appointment has recently been announced by the Office of Fair Trading (OFT), a government watchdog that tries to ensure fair competition?

Chris Rawlins is to be the OFT's new director of "markets and policy initiatives" and will, according to the OFT press release, "play a key role in the OFT's working relations with business, government and consumer organisations both national and international".

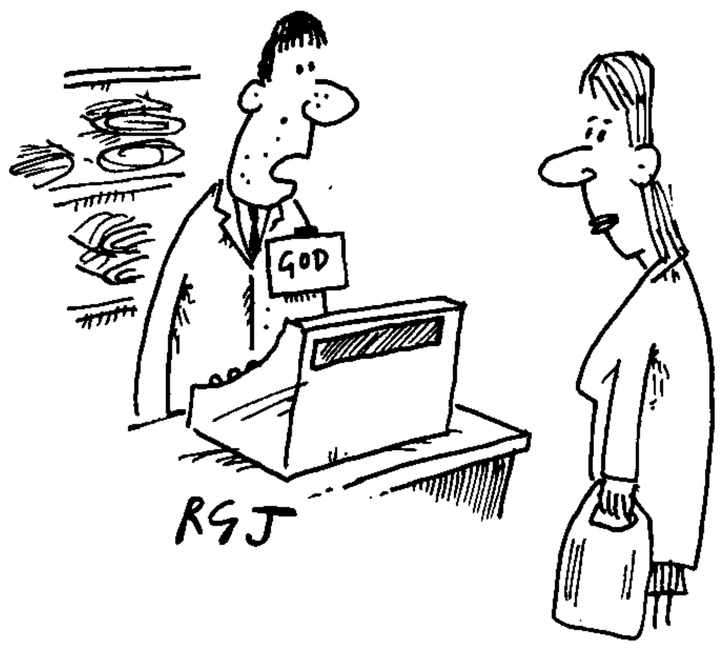
Mr Rawlins was, at the time of his appointment, director of the British Bankers Association, and has spent most of his life working for the big banks so ruthlessly criticised by the chancellor. It is unlikely the government was unaware, when it appointed him, of the record of the banks that supplied the OFT's new markets and policy initiatives king.

Two years ago the Cruickshank report revealed that "in general neither personal or small business customers were getting a fair deal from the banks". Moreover, "incumbent banks have made very high profits out of UK personal and small business customers, who have paid high prices and generally received poor services from the banks". Who better, then, to mastermind the government's competition policy initiatives than a proven banker?

ON LAST week's *Question Time* Labour minister Nick Brown boasted that he was educated at "Swatenden Secondary Modern".

True enough, but not the whole truth. After a brief spell at the secondary modern Brown went on to Tunbridge Wells grammar school for boys (formerly Tunbridge Wells technical high school), and thence to Manchester University.

Could it be Brown was trying to sound a little bit more humble than he really is? Or that he was shy about confessing to a TV audience that he had spent his formative years in Tunbridge Wells, spiritual home of disgruntled, Tory-voting *Telegraph* readers?



"It's amazing the job titles you can get in lieu of a pay rise"

IT IS not every day the *Eye* gets a handwritten letter from a former lord privy seal, so we have kept as an archaeological treasure a letter to us from Lord Wakeham dated 14 November 1994.

Wakeham had been a leading member of the Tory governments under Thatcher and Major, and was largely responsible for the privatisation of the coal industry. So, hearing on the grapevine that this keen racing fan had flown dramatically by helicopter on to the racecourse at Doncaster in September 1993, the *Eye* wrote to the noble lord to ask if by any chance he had been a guest of the new private owners of the British coal industry, who were also racing fans.

Wakeham's answer was written in his own hand – a touching gesture from a peer surrounded by secretaries and one of the richest men in the country. He explained: "In September 1993, as President of the Coal Trade Association, I attended the President's Charity Day at Doncaster Races. I had earlier that day carried out a series of Ministerial engagements in the North East. It involved flying to Teesside from London, several helicopter trips in the North East and finally helicopter to Doncaster. The helicopter was provided by the companies I was visiting in the North East. My wife drove to Doncaster in her own car and I left with her in her car after the races."

In the *Eye*'s scrupulous tradition of fair play, we did not consider that this answer merited any further inquiry or publication. But then we did not know that among the "companies" who paid for the helicopters was Enron – whose huge gas-fired power station Wakeham, as energy secretary, had ceremoniously opened. Wakeham was so delighted by his new friends at Enron he became a director of the main board and chairman of the audit commission. What happened next?

LAST week at South Africa's Mondi Newspaper Awards, two top prizes, including "South African Story of the Year", went to the Johannesburg *Sunday Times* investigative team.

It was recognised for its coverage of a multi-billion arms scandal, and its exposé of the bizarre way ANC chief whip Tony Yengeni received a top of the range Mercedes Benz, one of whose subsidiaries was a successful bidder for an arms contract. Designer dresser Yengeni blustered for month until press pressure forced him to resign.

And who was guest speaker at these glamorous awards? Step forward twice disgraced former minister Peter Mandelson, who knows a thing or two about undeclared gifts. One wag at the ceremony in the wealthy district of Sandton, Johannesburg, quipped: "When the Brits next dish out press awards, they should invite disgraced Tony Yengeni to do the honours."

Shortly after Mandy's first fall from grace, he was sent to South Africa to advise the ANC on election strategies. Not long after that the Dear Leader restored him to government. So could his latest jaunt herald another return to the government benches? Or could he set up shop in South Africa offering career advice to fellow disgraced parliamentarians?

SCOTLAND's first minister Jack McConnell has appointed the first ever chief executive to head up the Scottish prosecution service, following a report which slates the service as being under-funded and out of touch.

The man chosen is senior civil servant Robert Gordon, who is moving from his post as head of the Scottish executive's finance and central services. Fawning profiles of Gordon in some sections of the Scottish press omitted to mention, however, that he is also the civil servant responsible for the ill-fated construction of the new Scottish parliament building at Holyrood.

The projected cost of the building has soared to nearly £300m, more than seven times the original estimate of £40m. Presumably now that Gordon is in charge the Scottish prosecution service will no longer be under-funded and out of touch, but overtime and over budget.

HOW THE PUBLIC SECTOR WORKS

WHEN Tony Blair introduced a pamphlet to reassure public sector workers about his reform plans, he told them the reforms would "only be brought about through the efforts of skilled, dedicated and highly motivated public servants. This requires a genuine partnership between government and people in the front line like yourselves."

On cue, the cabinet office then signed a "total facilities management" contract with Ecovert, a subsidiary of the French contractor Bouygues, to deliver all repair, maintenance, reception, messenger, security, cleaning and catering services at the cabinet office for the next seven years. So much for partnership.

In Paris, president Jacques Chirac has been granted immunity from prosecution over corruption charges after accusations that Bouygues and other big contractors met to divvy up French public works contracts between them rather than compete. According to *Le Monde*, a 2 percent levy on contracts was then paid to Chirac's RPR party while he was mayor of Paris.

Bouygues executive Yvan Remplumaz, meanwhile, has been enthusiastic about Blair's privatisation drive. This is the same Yvan Remplumaz who was investigated by a French magistrate for misusing corporate funds in 1997. The firm's boss, Martin Bouygues, had to spend an embarrassing night in a police cell.

ANOTHER "new" Labour favourite is Amey, which in Northern Ireland is providing more evidence of the prime minister's genuine desire to form a strong partnership between government and public sector workers. Er... public sector librarians are being shunted aside and Amey brought in under a £36m private finance initiative (PFI) contract to run the computers and catalogues in 170 local libraries over 10 years.

The government has diverted £4m of "New Opportunities Fund" lottery cash into Amey's pocket, even though Amey is not an IT specialist and has no experience in libraries. As with other PFI deals, Amey has to invest in the project too, but when it won the contract it said it expected "to recover the majority of its investment during the first 18 months of the contract".

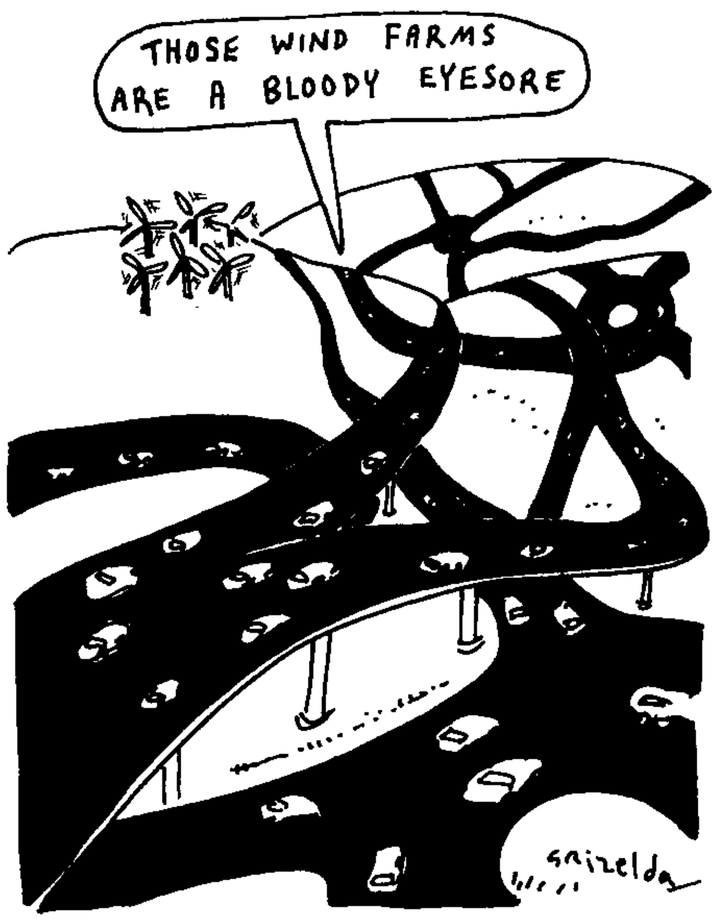
It is to be hoped Ulster's library users have better luck than school pupils in Glasgow, where Amey took over school premises in another PFI deal. At Holyrood school three computers burst into flames and light bulbs exploded following a power surge in the computer suite which was supposed to be the jewel in the scheme's crown. All 2,200 pupils had to be evacuated.

Amey is also in trouble in Scotland over its £50m contract to maintain the country's A roads. Since winning the contract in January, Amey has been issued with 14 warnings of poor performance by the Scottish executive (SE). West Lothian council is so angry about Amey's non-performance it has complained to the SE and will bill the SE for the time council staff spend dealing with complaints about Amey Highways. These are pouring in as angry drivers moan about hold-ups, diversions, roads being closed without notice and inadequate gritting during snow.

East Lothian MSP John Home Robertson has also attacked Amey for poor gritting. The company won the contract with a bid that was 50 percent lower than a consortium of council direct labour organisations, but seems to have too few snowploughs to do the work. It has been forced to subcontract gritting to the very local authorities it beat to win the contract.

THE government has scrapped plans to float its defence research company Qinetiq on the stock exchange (Qinetiq being the silly new name for the former Defence Evaluation and Research Agency) and is looking for a private investor to bid for a large stake in the company.

Qinetiq is supposed to find commercial uses for its inventions, and several firms including PFI giant Serco (see *Eyes passim*) have already expressed interest. Qinetiq did not, however, enjoy great success with the system to computerise the public records office's 1901 census and putting it online, but the website was closed to the public two days after it went live on 2 January and is still not up and running.



ARMS NEWS

BEN BRADSHAW, parliamentary under-secretary at the foreign office, took a high moral tone in his recent spat with George Galloway, the Labour MP who doesn't think another war with Iraq is a terribly good idea.

Bradshaw accused Galloway of being a "mouthpiece" for Saddam Hussein. But what of Bradshaw's own behind-the-scenes role on behalf of the arms industry?

Bradshaw was conveniently in India at the same time as the massive Defexpo arms fair between 18 and 23 February. As the *Eye* exclusively revealed, the British government is doing its bit for world peace by pushing weapons sales hard in India just as the country enters an arms race with neighbouring Pakistan.

Full support was offered to arms firms including Westland, Vickers and Vosper Thornycroft (chair: Lord Wakeham) by official bodies like Trade Partners UK and the Defence Export Sales Organisation. Though Bradshaw avoided visiting the fair so no awkward photographs appeared of him smiling in front of tanks or rockets covered in "for sale" signs, he did sneak into a private reception at the British High Commission for the salesmen who were attending the fair.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THE European "summit" in Belgium just before Christmas set up a new 100-strong commission to polish the "image of the new Europe" among young people. Tony Blair was delighted and nominated two of his favourite MPs, Europe minister Peter Hain and youngish Blairite clone David Miliband, to serve on it.

Less typical of the youthfulness to which the new commission will aspire is its president – the former French president Valery Giscard d'Estaing, 75. He lost the French presidency in an election in 1981, not long after his close relationship with the man imposed by France in 1965 as president of the Central African Republic, Col Jean Bedel Bokassa, came under scrutiny.

Bokassa was almost certainly clinically insane, but this didn't stop him receiving millions in aid from France. His coronation as emperor, in a desperately poor country, cost £20m, and when students rioted in protest at an order to wear uniforms from shops owned by their emperor, they were imprisoned, tortured and most of them killed.

Bokassa never lost Giscard's support, showering him with gifts of diamonds, and provided him with plenty of opportunities to indulge his passion for hunting lion and elephant. When criticised for these gifts, Giscard replied with the time-honoured defence that "everyone does it". For his new job, he has been provided with suitably palatial accommodation to satisfy his ego, but how he will get on with Hain, Miliband and other relatively youthful standard-bearers for the "new Europe" is not yet clear.

Number crunching

17,000
Officials, journalists and police attend Barcelona summit

1
Agreement reached

Down on the Fish Farm

HUNDREDS of square miles of Scottish waters are regularly closed to shellfish fishing because of toxic algal blooms, almost certainly exacerbated by untreated waste from factory-fish farms.

A ban imposed last June on fishing for king scallops in a 300 square mile area in the Moray Firth has only recently been lifted. But a new ban has been imposed on scallop fishing off the island of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides because of high levels of "naturally occurring" amnesic shellfish poisoning toxins. Prior to the expansion of fish farming in 1989 there was no record of any such toxic algal bloom anywhere in the West Highlands or Islands of Sctoland.

Meanwhile Seap (the Scottish environment pollution agency) has gone into overdrive dishing out consents for the use of toxic chemicals – known in the trade as "medicines" – to treat fish farm sea lice infestations. According to Seap, approvals for Azamethiphos, Cypermethrin, Emamectin benzoate and Teflbenzuron have leapt from less than 50 in 1998 to 723 in 2001. Andy Rosie, chairman of Seap's aquaculture management committee, is unconcerned: "There is an acceptable level of sustainable development here and we believe we have licensed the safe use of chemicals."

What volume of chemicals has Seap licensed? It doesn't keep a record. Will these chemicals impact on the coastal environment? Not according to Dr Kenny Black, head of the coastal impact research group at SAMS (Scottish association of marine sciences), a body depending entirely upon government cash handouts for its survival. Dr Kenny explained: "The view has been expressed that some sea-lochs are being absolutely wiped out by these therapeutants – well, we've seen nothing to back that up."

PS: At long last the Scottish executive has announced the name of the "independent scientific adviser" it has appointed to the Scottish parliament's rolling inquiry into fish farming. Step forward... SAMS, fronted by Dr Kenny Black.

'Old Trout'

TV

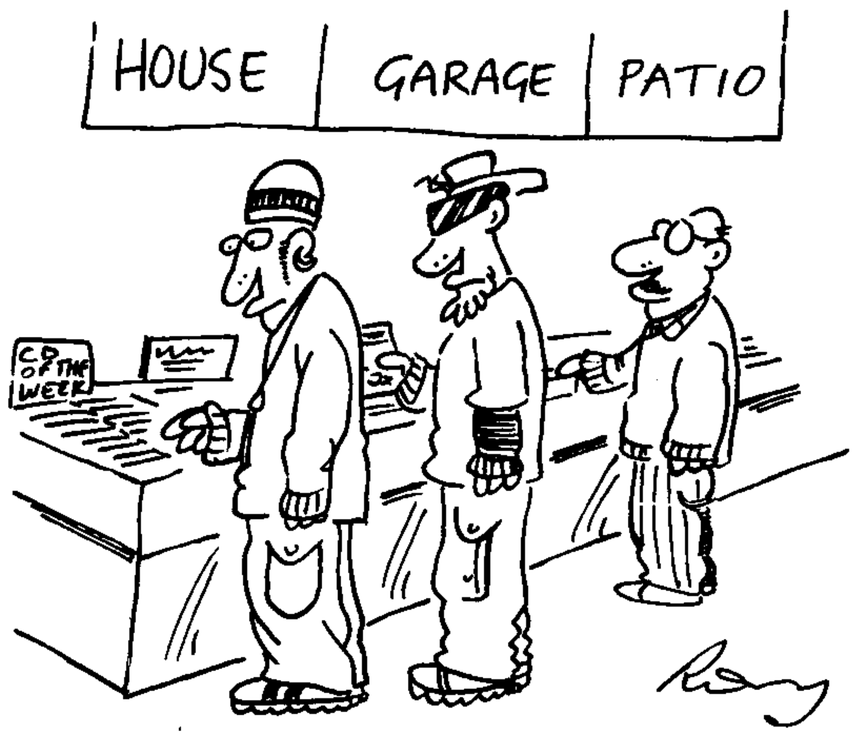
Survivor (ITV)
Shops, Robbers And Videotape (BBC1)

POOR old Gavyn Davies. Raised to the chairmanship of the BBC while still a relatively young man; possessor of beard; spells his name in a silly way; has loads of cash and is a friend of Tony; and as if this weren't enough, he makes a fantastically foolish speech, the main gist of which he has to renounce several days later, saying that he didn't really mean it after all.

True, television has always been run by the white, well-educated middle classes and it probably always will be. But is it run for them as well? We have *University Challenge* and David Starkey, and now we have BBC4, although obviously no self-respecting white well-educated middle-class person would ever get the digital technology you need to watch it. But what else is there to watch? Forget the dumbing down debate, which has been hijacked by right-wing newspapers whose anti-BBC agenda is known to all. Let's be straightforward about this. What is there to watch? On any of the channels? And who is supposed to be watching it?

Take a typical Wednesday evening, as the white well-educated middle classes settle down after a dinner almost certainly involving polenta, if not sun-dried tomatoes. Already Manchester United has entranced the nation with a gripping 0-0 draw at home to someone or other, while on BBC1 Eamonn Holmes has reduced the nine clueless people playing this week's *National Lottery Jet Set* to the six clueless people who will contest Saturday's final. On BBC2 we've had a *Good Life* episode not shown for several weeks, and later there will be an *Attachments* episode that will never be shown again, anywhere, for good reasons. It's under such desperate circumstances that even white well-educated middle-class people might be forced to watch **Survivor** or **Shops, Robbers And Videotape**. Shit happens, as they say, and on Wednesday it's on both main channels.

Survivor returns for a second series for no reason that anyone can identify, including the people working on the programme. Last year it was one of ITV's most embarrassing failures, an expensive but uninvolving variation on the reality TV format. Even the prize money — £1m — seems an empty gesture and no one cares who wins it. This new series is slightly more down-to-earth in its look, with less pseudo-tribal posturing by the contestants, while previous presenter Mark Austin has been replaced by cricket smoothie Mark Nicholas, whose nonchalantly quiffed hair and obvious desire to be Roger Moore have clearly marked him out for greater things.



While the contestants are generally covered in mud and eat nothing but ants for four days, Nicholas has more costume changes than Diana Ross. But the programme is still heroically boring, and when 22-year-old Sarah became the first person to be voted off the island, it was of such widespread public interest that one paper called her Helen by mistake.

Next to *Shops Robbers And Videotape*, however, *Survivor* is high art. Yes, we're in the familiar world of secret cameras, CCTV, self-justifying policemen and a gung-ho voiceover (by Jamie "Vice Squad" Theakston) which drools over words like "gun" and "machete". "All over Britain," says Theakston, "violent crime appears to have reached epidemic proportions." And if you fancy joining in, but didn't know how to do it, this programme can give you a few tips.

All the clichés are here: shaven-headed thugs who call themselves "businessmen"; speeding cars; scary music; and senior policemen who say that all bobbies on the beat should carry AK-47s. As propaganda for a police state it works well, and also as gun porn for perves; it's just as a TV programme that it fails. Gavyn Davies should be forced to watch this over and over again until his beard falls out.

Ten years ago Davies may have been half right. BBC2 was lovingly awash with arts programmes and BBC1 was solidly middlebrow. Even ITV had the occasional show you might want to see. But now all programme controllers are chasing an audience they imagine to be troglodytes. What characterises both *Survivor* and *Shops, Robbers And Videotapes* is the contempt they hold for their viewers. It's a contempt that white well-educated middle-class viewers, such as this one, feel honour bound to reciprocate.

'Couch Potato'

DUMB BRITAIN

National Lottery Jet Set, BBC1

Eamonn Holmes: Who wrote the novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*?

Contestant: Sherlock Holmes.

Holmes: What does JS Bach's middle initial stand for?

Contestant: Stewart.

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Who was the only inmate of Spandau Prison in Berlin between 1966 and 1987?

Contestant: The Birdman of Alcatraz.

DUMB GERMANY

The Weakest Link, German TV

Sonja Zietlow: What popular chocolate bar was named after the Roman god of war?

Contestant: Snickers.

Answers: 1. Thomas Hardy. 2. Sebastian. 3. Rudolf Hess. 4. Mars.

MEDIA NEWS

THE BBC clearly views Gavyn Davies's attack on the "middle class moaners" who accuse the corporation of "dumbing down" as a huge gaffe.

Davies himself had already accused the BBC of "dumbing down" in the search for increased market share when he became chairman – a slip that has delighted Beeb-watchers in the press. And he was ordered by Dyke to go on the *World at One* in an attempt to blame the press for misquoting him. He also had to write a grovelling letter to Sir John Mortimer, who correctly identified his comments as "incomprehensible, illiterate and absurd".

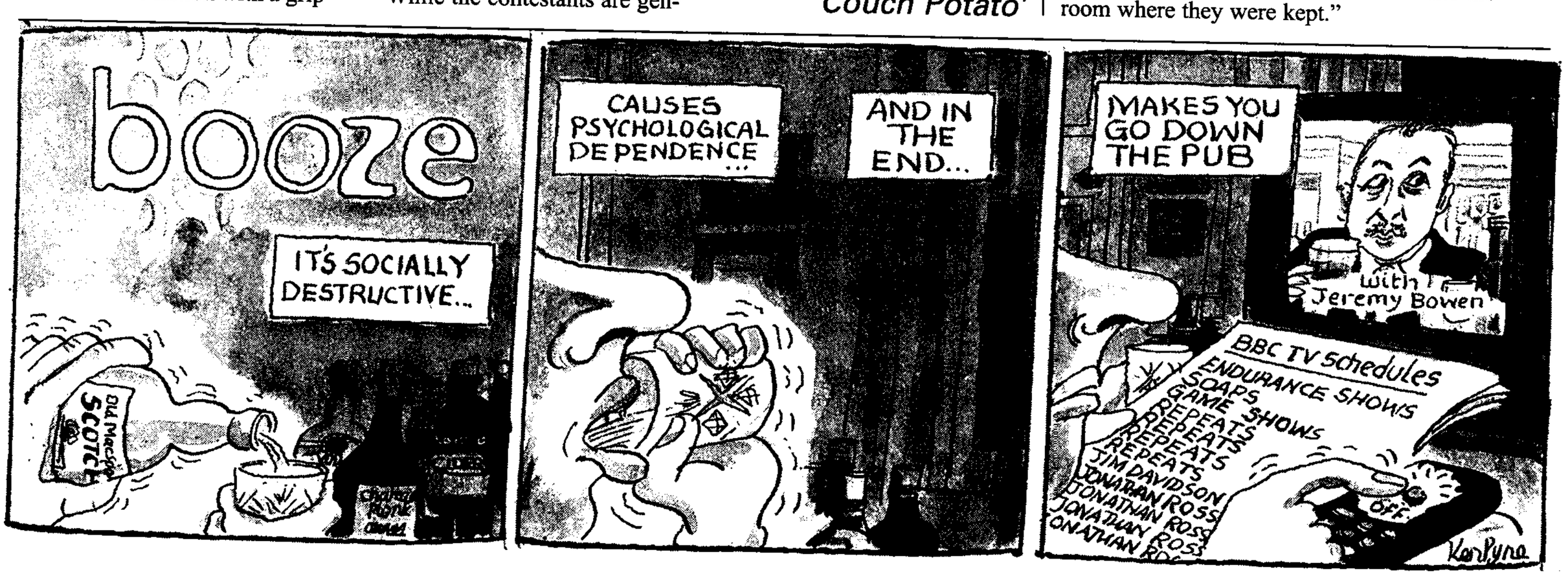
Before becoming BBC chairman, Davies attended six meetings to advise Enron of "its future prospects" and was reportedly "amazed" when he heard later of "irregularities". He seems to be demonstrating a similar grip on reality at the BBC.

YET more evidence that Greg Dyke regards BBC current affairs programmes as "crap".

Now flagship weekend current affairs programme *On the Record* faces the partial chop, as BBC mandarins' shave off twenty minutes of the programme to devote to yet more turgid "regional news".

LETTER in *Ariel*: "I recently attempted to borrow a couple of books from the learning resource centre at Marylebone High St.

However, I've now been told that these books are inaccessible until further notice because... the 'Making It Happen' team has moved into the room where they were kept."



THERE was a time when BBC2's *What The Papers Say* involved a wide-ranging review of the newspapers presented by a selection of newspaper hacks. But it is now so short and so shallow that it is hardly worth keeping.

In its most pointless edition so far, BBC correspondent Rageh Omaar set out to cover the Zimbabwean "elections" story from a chair plonked in the middle of the South African veldt. He began by reminding viewers that he was banned from entering Zimbabwe – "far from ideal but such are the circumstances" – and would presumably be less than up to speed either with the Zimbabwean press or indeed the UK press, unread 6,000 miles away in the programme's Manchester office.

A script about war veterans followed, based loosely on a few cuttings from the *Daily Mail*, *FT* and *Torygraph*. Omaar also managed a plug for *Grauniad* hack Chris McGreal who *had* got into Zimbabwe. Apart from the briefest glance at what should have been the focus of the programme – Mugabe's persecution of journalists – that was it.

The only thing that saves *WTPS* from the chop is its annual awards lunch, which allows BBC top brass to swan about at the Savoy and grandly reward an increasingly narrow collective of "on-message" hacks and their organs.

AD NAUSEAM

MEDIA agencies pride themselves on the art of placement, which means putting an ad in the spot where it will have most impact – an army recruitment spot in a war film, for example.

So hats off to a piece of inspired placement on ITV last Monday, during an episode of cop-show *The Vice*. The story centred on a child-porn ring, containing several disturbing sequences in which a father used his 12-year-old daughter for sex.

After one particularly unpleasant scene the programme cut to the break, whereupon the first ad was for Disneyworld. It was all about taking your daughter somewhere to have fun "no matter how big your little girl is". The hotline was jammed, but not for the reasons Disney was expecting.

HOLD on to your cargo pants: French Connection is back, promising another batch of groundbreaking/illegal advertising. Last week chief executive Stephen Marks began the hard sell with an announcement that a new campaign is slated for May. The little devil tried his darnedest to set tongues wagging, saying with a nudge and wink the campaign would "surprise and excite all our customers".

Odd that Marks didn't mention another significant announcement the week before, in which the Advertising Standards Authority confirmed that French Connection had finally "agreed to seek and follow copy advice for all its non-broadcast advertisements in paid-for space until the end of March 2003".

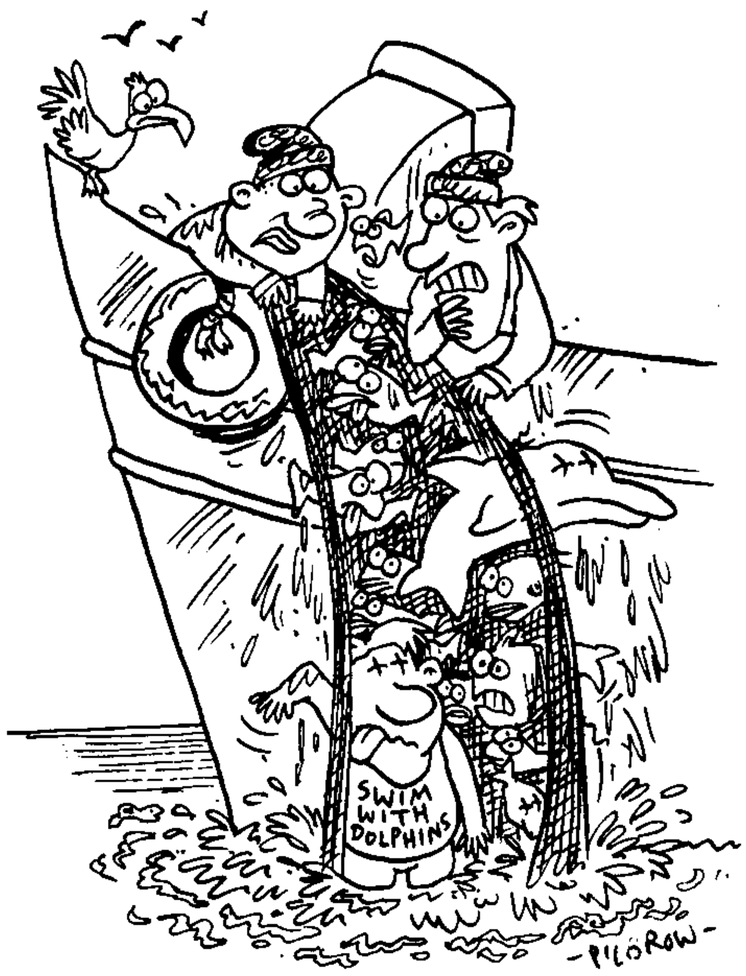
This came after countless raps from both the ASA and ITC, the TV regulator, for the hilarious "fcuk" campaign (*see Ad Nauseams ad nauseam*).

The upshot of all the pettifogging is that whatever French Connection's new campaign turns out to be – and Ad Nauseam will keep you posted – its most "surprising" aspect is likely to be its tameness. This may not "excite" customers, but it will be a blessed relief for everyone else.

CORRECTION

IN *Eye 1049* we mistakenly said that *Prisons Privatisation Report International* is published by the Prison Reform Trust.

The report is in fact published by the Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU) at the University of Greenwich and can be found on the internet at www.psiru.org/justice. We apologise to the report's editor Stephen Nathan for any embarrassment caused.



Warballs

"It's all about texture and tone. The look is still architectural and I've kept a stainless-steel oven and hob – essential for hygiene – but I feel stainless steel feels far too clinical, especially after 11 September."

— Designer florist Stephen Woodhams on redesigning his kitchen, *Financial Times*.

"The tragic events of 11 September 2001 have affected us all… Our industry and economy *must* recover and we should all do our part to contribute in any way we can. TommaX Inc, in an effort to assist government, military and defense related organisations worldwide, has decided to reduce the price of the highly acclaimed *Russia's Arms and Technologies 21st Century Encyclopaedia* series. Effective immediately each book of this series will be discounted from $495.00 to $295.00. Volumes currently available: Vol. 1 – *Strategic Nuclear Forces…*"

— Sales pitch from TommaX Inc.

"Jeremy Goford has been elected president of the Institute of Actuaries in the United kingdom, the first Tillinghurst-Towers Perrin principal to be so honoured. Jeremy noted that the events of 11 September served to underscore the importance of the work actuaries do, as reflected in the Institute's motto *Certum ex incertis* (Certainty out of Uncertainty)."

— Announcement from Tillinghurst-Towers Perrin, actuaries and consultants.

"*If you had to choose between a dinner with George W. Bush and a safari with Angelina Jollie, which one would you prefer?* Both would be very interesting. Under other circumstances and at other times, I would choose the safari. However, given the tragic events of 11 September and their repercussions for humanity, at this particular time I would choose dinner with George W. Bush."

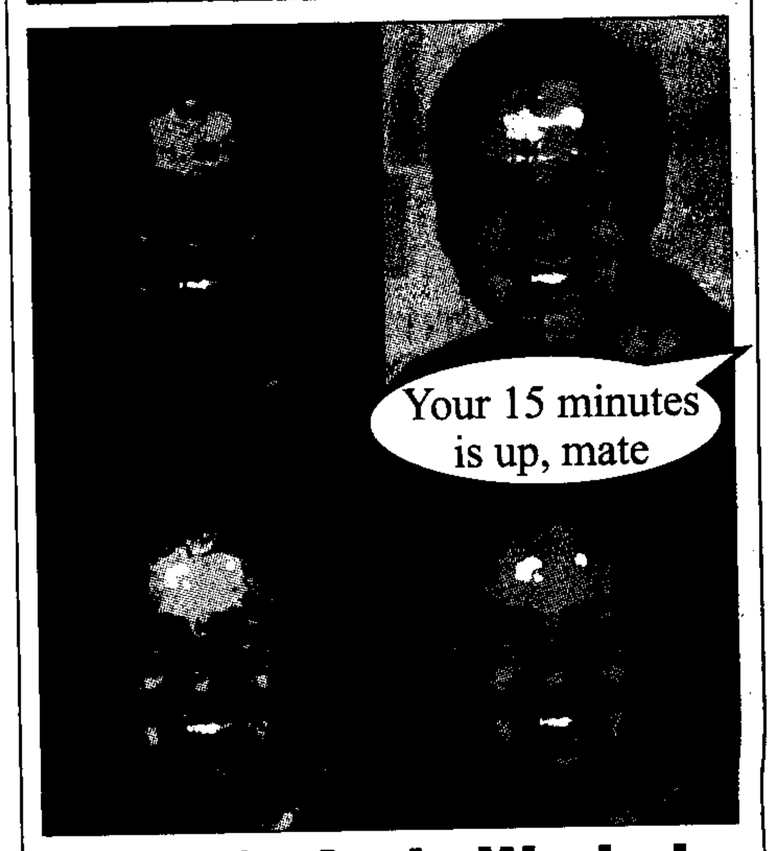
— Interview with Dimitri Kounelakis, group marketing director of Interamerican, in Romanian Airlines' inflight mag.

"The port manager has reported to the board that, on the latest information available from the offshore industry, the terrorist attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001 are not expected to affect plans for future operations in the southern North Sea."

— East Anglian port authority newsletter.

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore



Handy Andy Warhol

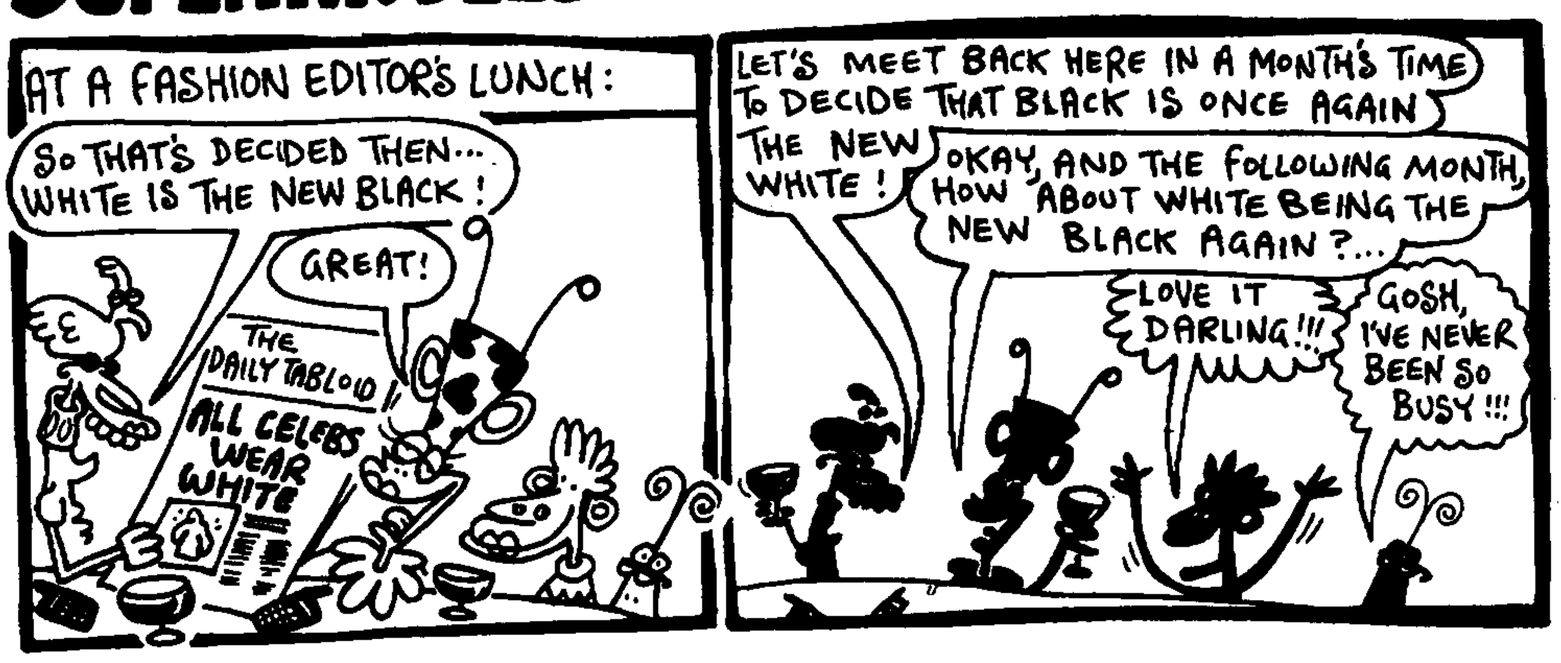
GOING LIVE

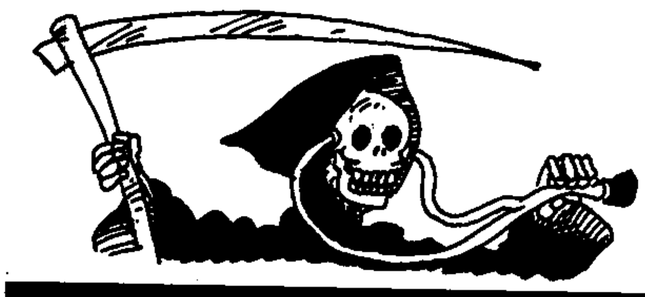
WHEN GMTV went live to Helen Morton in New York on 11 March for a report on the 11 September memorial ceremony, it had just gone 3am local time.

"It's going to be an emotional and poignant day for those who lost loved ones," predicted the hackette sagely, a full six hours before the ceremony was due to start.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


AT A FASHION EDITOR'S LUNCH:
SO THAT'S DECIDED THEN... WHITE IS THE NEW BLACK!
GREAT!
THE DAILY TABLOID
ALL CELEBS WEAR WHITE
LET'S MEET BACK HERE IN A MONTH'S TIME TO DECIDE THAT BLACK IS ONCE AGAIN THE NEW WHITE!
OKAY, AND THE FOLLOWING MONTH, HOW ABOUT WHITE BEING THE NEW BLACK AGAIN?...
LOVE IT DARLING!!!
GOSH, I'VE NEVER BEEN SO BUSY!!!



DOING THE ROUNDS

WHO would be an NHS manager? With Tony Blair's career hinging on his promise to turn round the NHS in time for the next election (see last *Eye*), the heat is on to ensure hospitals and the new primary care trusts (PCTs) hit their key targets while somehow "coming in on balance" and implementing the most ambitious programme of untested reform since Margaret Thatcher landed us with "Working for Patients" in 1989.

"New" Labour's objection to the inequality of the Tory's internal market seems a tad hollow with the liberation of "three star" trusts to run their own affairs, while failing trusts will be franchised out to whoever's interested in an untested bureaucratic scheme that could make them worse. And as well as competing internally, the NHS is taking on bids for work from European all-comers. Quite who picks up the tab if complications arise remains to be seen.

The latest missive, *Shifting the Balance of Power*, advocates the abolition of district health authorities and replacement with primary care trusts on 1 April, a rapid and massive administrative upheaval that courts disaster. As one GP "at the front line and ready to duck" told the *Eye*: "There will be cock-ups aplenty and much public money will be vaporised. The bodies designed to oversee and set standards will not even be created until six months after the PCTs. And the levels of inherited debt will wipe out any planned investments in primary care – debts run up by the hospital system."

The idea behind PCTs isn't a bad one – enabling local healthcare professionals and patients to plan and commission the services they need from local hospitals – but a King's Fund report recently berated PCTs for their minimal public involvement and even supporters of the scheme are having cold feet as to whether it will work in practice. GP Michael Dixon, previously a staunch supporter of the "new" Labour health agenda, has quit his role as a PCT commissioner saying they have become too large to serve local communities, have too few resources and can't cope with the pace of change. And, as ever with "new" Labour, they pretend to decentralise control while setting a whole plethora of central standards. "Hospitals are only really interested in national priorities… they are reluctant to change and obstruct PCTs from delivering locally."

The danger for Labour is that *Shifting the Balance* will degenerate into *Rearranging the Deckchairs*. PCTs will become as unwieldy, debt-ridden and ineffective as the district health authorities they replace, and the "new" strategic health authorities will be indistinguishable from the old regional health authorities. And although more money is undoubtedly going into the NHS, much of it will be swallowed by the cost of reform and target hitting, rather than addressing the NHS's most urgent problem – lack of capacity.

Targets will doubtless be met, but will they mean anything? Health analyst Dr Kieran Walshe believes the system of accountability "isn't sufficiently robust to resist fixing if there is enough riding on the results". At a recent Royal Society of Medicine forum on "Quality in healthcare" (sic), delegates gave examples of data altered to meet waiting list targets suggesting the problem is far more widespread than the few London trusts outed for fiddling by the audit commission.

The real failure of Labour is its inability to change the culture of fear, blame and job insecurity that has prevented the NHS from implementing the improvements in access and quality that are so obviously needed. Without this cultural change, all the extra money will come to nothing.

M.D.

SIGNAL FAILURES

THE latest quarterly train-performance statistics reflect another cock-up by Stephen Byers and his transport department, which ordered the strategic rail authority (SRA) to stop publishing monthly figures as they generated too much bad news (*Eye* 1043).

The statistics released this month relate to last year's autumn quarter when for various reasons train performance was appalling. Byers has had to apologise for this. So far this year, however, performance has actually been slightly better – but this is not reflected in the latest figures. Instead, the delayed statistics give the impression that the railways are still as bad as ever; and the quiet transformation of Railtrack into something vaguely credible is still being ignored by journalists and others determined to portray Railtrack plc's demise as a disaster.

In fact senior Railtrack managers are now openly admitting the flaws in the way the company functioned. Previously they had to keep quiet to avoid depressing the share price, but now a semblance of open debate on safety-related issues has returned.

The old plc believed its chief role was to shunt cash around rather than be a "boring old utility", so it left contractors to manage its maintenance work. The Hatfield crash showed how deficient engineering could wreck the best laid plans of accountants, but even then Railtrack was reluctant to give engineering precedence over cash.

The *Eye* and others argued for years that Railtrack relied too heavily on its contractors, expecting them to invest in machinery on the strength of short-term contracts. Now Railtrack is becoming more proactive in maintenance and buying hi-tech machines to help it overcome the neglect of the plc years. This new approach is symbolised by an American-built rail-grinding train which recently arrived in Britain, six years late. It was left stateside after Railtrack plc's financial experts decided routine rail grinding was a waste of money. In fact grinding rails to the optimum profile reduces wear and tear and the risk of derailments, thereby reducing costs.

Being proactive now enables Railtrack to compile and keep a register of its assets, which it failed to do as a plc, despite being ordered to do so by the regulator. As contracts changed, the people who held bits of the register in their offices or their heads were replaced by newcomers who had few or no records to hand. Richard Middleton, now Railtrack's technical director, has admitted the company's ignorance of the condition of the west-coast mainline is one reason the cost of upgrading it has more than trebled since the original estimate (*Eyes passim*). Accurate asset information may show that in places building new lines is more cost-effective than trying to upgrade and expand Victorian ones.

Railtrack's new priorities should make life easier for passengers as the benefits gradually emerge, but they're a nuisance for the media and shareholders who want to insist that Railtrack plc's end was a tragedy. The media don't want to admit that Byers has made one right decision; and the shareholders' claim for compensation depends on proving that the plc had a viable future. Train operators and the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC), who were quick to criticise increasing Railtrack-caused delays last autumn, have been silent about the recent improvements.

'Dr B. Ching'

"Oh no!"

DOWN ON THE FARM

MORE evidence floods in to show why the Beloved Leader was so right not to allow a proper public inquiry into the foot-and-mouth disaster. Even members of his "pseudo-inquiry" teams under Dr Iain Anderson and Sir Brian Follett are said to be shocked by stories they have heard as they wander round the country giving the impression they are genuinely seeking independent evidence.

One particularly damning document is a submission to the separate inquiry being held by the Royal Society of Edinburgh from Valerie Lusmore, a consultant who advises international companies on computer modelling. Her evidence is particularly relevant since the government's catastrophic mishandling of the 2001 epidemic centred, of course, on the illegal "contiguous cull" policy, derived from a computer model set up by Prof Roy Anderson and his team at Imperial College.

Her paper opens by describing how, as soon as FMD was identified, MAFF invited three teams of epidemiologists, all with extensive experience in animal diseases, to draw up computer models to predict how the epidemic would develop. In early March a fourth team suddenly appeared, led by Prof Anderson.

On the face of it, Anderson and his colleagues seemed to have little qualification to pronounce on FMD. Their speciality was human diseases. But they did have one enormous advantage in that Prof Anderson was well known to Blair's new chief scientist, Prof David King, and had worked at Oxford with Sir John Krebs of the Food Standards Agency. Thanks to backing from Krebs, Anderson's team was the one chosen by King to come up with a strategy and, thanks to its computer model, originally designed to track sexually transmitted diseases in humans, the "contiguous cull" was on its way.

As a specialist in computer modelling, Lusmore began to keep close watch on what was happening. "Along with many other people," she writes, "I tried to understand the factors behind this model, and found it difficult to understand why this particular approach had been used".

What caught her attention even more was the quality of the data being fed into Anderson's computer. For a start, it relied on MAFF's notoriously inefficient tracing procedures in the early weeks of the epidemic. It made no allowance for the totally different ways in which FMD affected the various species involved, which any expert in animal diseases could have told them was crucial. Perhaps the worst blunder of all was to assume that the Pan Asian O strain could be wind-borne up to three kilometres, even though Dr Alex Donaldson at the FMD world reference laboratory at Pirbright had already established that spread was no more than 200 metres. Yet on this central error Anderson based his advice that all animals within three kilometres of an infected farm should be "culled", leading to the pointless slaughter of more than nine million healthy animals.

Much of Lusmore's paper is concerned with showing how the data compiled by Maff was chaotically inadequate, inaccurate and inconsistent. But her main conclusion is that choice of the Anderson computer model was due to "pressure from political sources to come up with a quick solution" and was a grotesque mistake. This may be what many vets, farmers and others have known for a long time, but it is good to have it confirmed by a specialist in computer modelling. Her paper can be read in full on www.warmwell.com.uk.

'Muckspreader'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

GIVE US A THUG

DARRYL STEPHENSON, chief executive of East Riding of Yorkshire council (Eryc), must be one of the most disliked men north of Watford. Every week this column receives letters from council taxpayers and staff, detailing what Darren has done to upset them.

The postman has been particularly burdened since news broke of Darren's recent 34.5 percent pay rise (*Eye* 1049), which will bring his salary up to £140,000. Many letters come from pensioners absorbing the news that Eryc plans to save nearly £100,000 (a "Darryl" in old money) next year by ending meals-on-wheels. Others come from former Eryc staff who have had their jobs "reevaluated" (Darryl-speak for pay cuts), many reevaluated out of existence.

Yet more write after seeing photographs of Darren in Eryc's propaganda sheet, *East Riding News*, posing outside Lairgate Hall, the former council offices in Beverley, with thuggish property developer Philip Bramley. *Eye* 1008 told how in 1999 Eryc had sold Lairgate, an exquisitely-decorated mansion dating from 1700 and one of the few grade I listed buildings in Beverley, to Bramley for £500,000. Locals were not happy. Bramley, a failed second-hand car dealer, had been fined £400 in 1997 for assaulting two bailiffs with an axe. In 2000 he was banned for drink-driving, imprisoned for two weeks for non-payment of maintenance, was in receipt of a county court judgment against his company, Landmark, for debts of more than £11,000 and was declared bankrupt. Now he stands to make a bomb letting out the "sensitively" refurbished offices Eryc sold for a song.

TAKING UP THE SLACK

ELECTION candidates banned from criticising the authorities… not allowed to issue leaflets, hold meetings or contact the press? Sounds like Zimbabwe, but it's Leicester, UK, where the Labour city council and local MP Patricia Hewitt are in denial about the problems of a flagship regeneration programme for a notorious housing estate.

The 1930s Braunstone estate, in the trade and industry secretary's Leicester West constituency, won £50m in New Deal money three years ago to address serious problems of crime, poverty and unemployment. The Braunstone community association (BCA), set up to run the scheme, ran into problems in its first year. Targets were not met and there were rows with the council. But the BCA still gave its £50,000-a-year chief executive Tim Slack (sic) a £10,000 pay rise. Then the BCA moved its HQ from the heart of the estate to a high-security site the other side of a main road.

There was uproar when Braunstone resident Ray Ross revealed that he had been bugging Slack's opponents in the BCA and supplying the tapes to Slack and his chairman, John Sergeant. Ross turned double-agent, though, taping Slack and Sergeant, because he believed they were preventing residents from becoming involved in the project.

When these tawdry allegations became public the BCA set up an inquiry. The three-member panel concluded that Slack had not ordered the bugging. But it did not comment on the fact that Slack and Sergeant had listened to the tapes, and referred them to the BCA's solicitors months previously, to see if they could be used against the "plotters". The inquiry and the move of HQ ate up £200,000 of "regeneration" funds.

Sergeant stood down for "personal reasons" but his successor, Dorothy Greenhill, has proved another champion of democracy. She chaired a board meeting which agreed unprecedented restrictions on campaigning during this month's BCA elections, in which seven unpaid directorships are up for grabs in a ballot of 7,000 residents. Anyone who breaks Greenhill's Mugabe-style rules will be removed from the candidates list.

While the bickering goes on, vandals and arsonists are trashing hundreds of empty council homes the BCA is meant to refurbish later this year. And so another Labour "beacon" project goes up in flames.

● **QUOTE OF THE WEEK: "Councillors decided not to take a final decision."**
(BBC *Look East* news, 6 March.)

FLANNEL PANEL

GOOD to see that Bath and North-east Somerset council (Banes) has its spending priorities right. The cash-strapped council, which has poured money into its own millennium white elephant, the Bath Spa project (*Eyes passim*), is cutting services and putting up council tax.

Residents in one area who had pleaded for better street lighting because of fears about crime were rebuffed because Lib-Dem dominated Banes couldn't spare the necessary £100,000.

Precisely half that sum, however, *was* found to take disciplinary action against a Labour councillor, Peter Jovcic-Sas, who had accused two officers of being politically biased. Cllr Jovcic-Sas was hauled before a panel of lawyers who found he had broken the local government code of conduct by failing to show sufficient "respect and trust" to officers. The six-man hearing went ahead even though the councillor had already retracted his allegation and apologised.

While Banes was rubbing its hands at having slapped down Jovcic-Sas, a young woman was brutally assaulted in one of the unlit lanes where residents had requested more streetlamps.

DRAKES DRUMMED

DRAKES, the company which since June 2000 has had the lucrative clamping-and-towing contract for Westminster (*Eye* 1045), has been caught attempting to overcharge the Tory-run council £65,000 for the use of a de-clamp van.

Last April Westminster asked Drakes to use an additional de-clamp van during busy evenings and weekends. John Wood, manager of Drakes' Park Lane depot, duly deployed the vehicle. Five months later Drakes director Sydney Simcox instructed Wood to raise an invoice for £85,000 for its use. But Wood knew that for much of the period the vehicle had been out of action because of staff shortages. He estimated that the bill should be more like £20,000 and decided to send the invoice first to Frank Millerick, another director of Drakes. He told Millerick he had been instructed to bill Westminster as if the vehicle had been used every day, and emphasised that Westminster should be invoiced for £20,000, not £85,000.

Millerick, however, sent the full bill to Westminster, where auditors eventually queried it. Drakes repaid the £65,000 and informed the council that Wood was now facing a disciplinary charge for having "raised an inaccurate/fraudulent… invoice".

At the disciplinary hearing on 6 March the panel was all set to sack Wood but was taken aback to find that Wood was not only a member of the GMB union, but was to be represented by a senior official. So he got a "final written warning" instead of the sack. The GMB is appealing against the decision to issue the innocent Wood with a warning and has written to the leader of Westminster council, Simon Milton, asking "what the council intends to do with a contractor that intentionally submits inaccurate invoices with the intention to defraud".

A LETTER in last week's Doncaster Free Press, 'Concerned over new bus route' was attributed to Liberal Democrat campaigner Batty Hayes. The writer was in fact Barry Hayes.

Doncaster Free Press

DONNYGATE

It's far from over. Special post-trial report In The Back, page XX.

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

TROUBLE is stirring at the new universities where the decline in student numbers has led to cutbacks in government funding. Even Oxford Brookes, the first former poly to rank among traditional universities in the higher education league tables, is suffering.

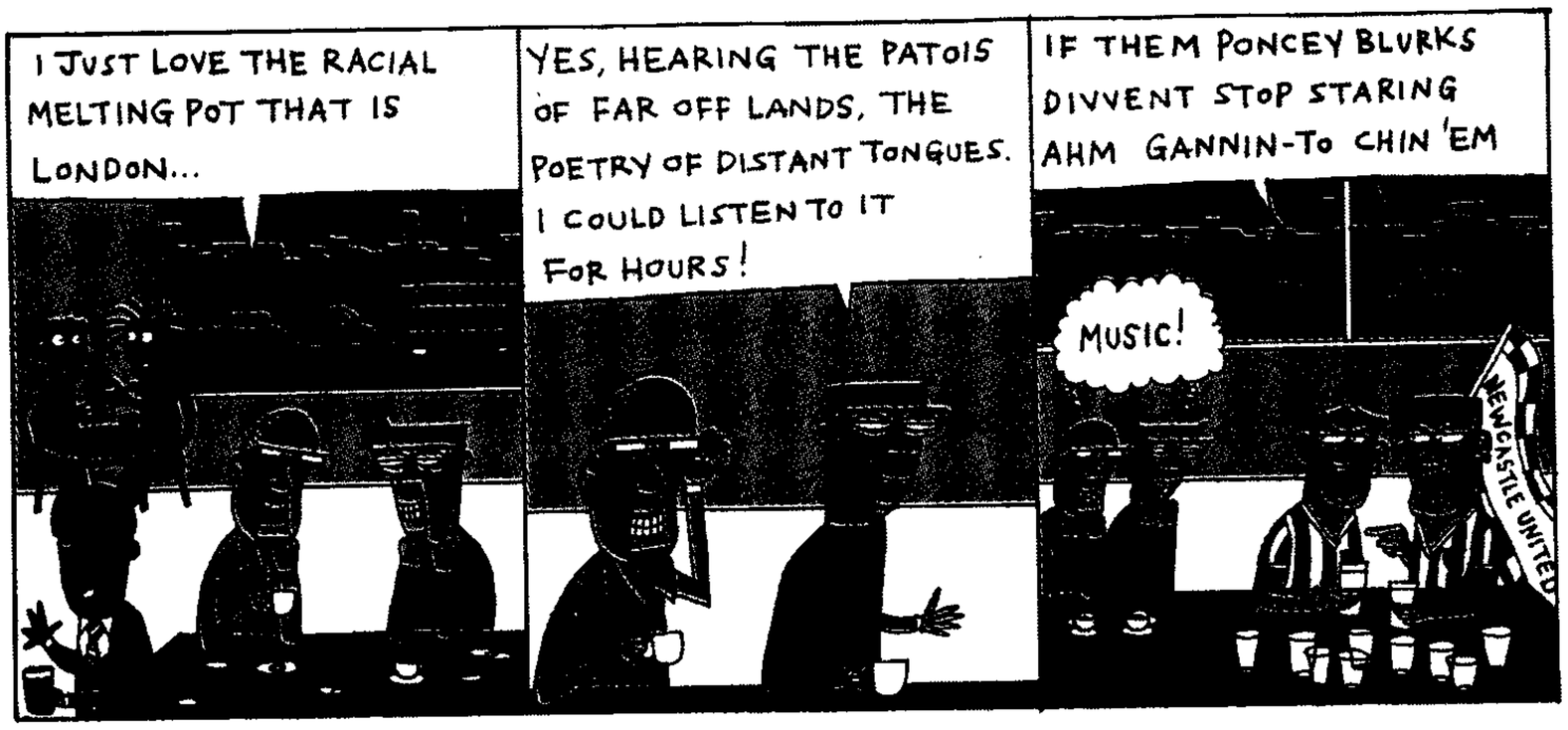
The recent announcement by vice-chancellor Graham Upton that four departments – geology, chemistry, civil engineering and cartography – are to be phased out, was made with appalling timing (the field chair of geology was overseas) and has prompted a vote of no confidence by members of the lecturer's union NATFHE at the university. At least 25 jobs will be affected, including some redundancies with more likely to follow.

Shortly before Christmas the university, which says the cutbacks are necessary to meet its £1.6m budget deficit, said that up to 120 mainly academic posts could go as a result of a 37 percent cut in government funding over the past decade. Upton has not suffered personally from the shortfall, however. Last year he was given a 6.8 percent pay rise to £110,000, more than double the 3 percent rise for other academic staff at the university.

At Luton University meanwhile, where around 50 jobs were lost last year, applications have fallen by more than 27 percent. Luton's deputy vice-chancellor, Steve Pettit, told the *Times*: "We did anticipate a drop in the number of applications to Luton this year, due to the fact that we reduced the number of undergraduate courses on offer in order to focus on our strongest subjects." Pettit's words are a complete about-turn since senior pro-vice-chancellor Kate Robinson explained the rationale behind redundancies at Luton in a round robin in March 2001. Then Robinson wrote: "We are trying to move away from reliance on markets which are static or in decline and towards areas where there is more demand and we are more likely to be able to maintain or expand our student intake."

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER


I JUST LOVE THE RACIAL MELTING POT THAT IS LONDON...
YES, HEARING THE PATOIS OF FAR OFF LANDS, THE POETRY OF DISTANT TONGUES. I COULD LISTEN TO IT FOR HOURS!
IF THEM PONCEY BLURKS DIVVENT STOP STARING AHM GANNIN-TO CHIN 'EM
MUSIC!
NEWCASTLE UNITED

NOOKS and CORNERS

FOLLOWING the scandal of Jumbo the Colchester water tower (*Eye* 1049) comes another case of the planning inspectorate cheerfully ignoring expert advice and local opinion and contributing to the spoiling of the environment. It is also a case in which the Church of England has ruthlessly pursued its own introverted agenda rather than consider what might be best for the local parish or England.

Penshurst, at the gates of that great medieval house Penshurst Place, is one of the loveliest villages in Kent. The Rectory, overlooking the churchyard, has a handsome and typical Early Georgian seven-bay front although the building behind is much older. It is a building which belongs, and looks the part. But the Bishop of Rochester – the Rt Rev Dr M.J. Nazir-Ali, one of the contenders for Archbishop Carey's lurex mitre – wants to sell it, while the village remains anxious that the Rectory continues in its present long-established use.

The last rector of the combined benefice of Penshurst with Fordcombe died in 1994. The patron of the living, Viscount De L'Isle, was soon able to recommend a successor to the bishop: the Rev Tom Holme, who was willing – indeed wanted – to live in the old Rectory. But in 1995 the good bishop decided to suspend the "patron's right of presentation", obliging Mr Holme to be inducted not as rector but merely as priest-in-charge. Why? Because under the "parsonage measure of 1938", a bishop only has the power to flog old vicarages during a vacancy in the benefice. Smart, eh?

In its modern, suburban-minded incarnation, the C of E authorities insist that no clergyman can possibly now manage to live in an old house. They also maintain that historic buildings are too large and expensive to maintain, although the usual cheap replacement vicarages are usually deficient in firmness and commodity as well as in delight. In 1994 Messrs Howard Sharp & Partners, surveyors to the diocese, estimated the cost of repairs to Penshurst Rectory at £120,000. However, Lord De L'Isle's architect, Charles Brown – formerly surveyor to York Minster – considered the figure should be rather lower, at £30,000, and, in the event, the bill for making the Rectory suitable for the new incumbent was £24,000. Funny, that.

Anxious for continuity in the village, Lord De L'Isle generously offered to buy the old Rectory and lease it back to the diocese but negotiations foundered. Meanwhile the modern vicarage in Fordcombe was sold by the diocese which, in 1996, proposed to build a new residence at Penshurst on the glebe land next to the old Rectory.

Plans were drawn up by architect Roger Molyneux for the diocesan surveyors. The scheme was rejected by Sevenoaks district council, while both English Heritage and the Countryside Commission opposed a new development on the glebe land. Bishops do not like opposition, however, and are easily piqued. Two years ago, the Bishop of Rochester announced the continuation of the suspension of the right of presentation for another five years and again applied for planning permission to build a new rectory. The application was rejected by all the relevant planning authorities.

The diocese appealed against this decision, the appeal being heard by Denis F. McCoy, an inspector with the Bristol-based, government-appointed planning inspectorate. Mr McCoy, an architect, recognised that "the great mansion at Penshurst Place, the Church of St John the Baptist, and the Rectory can be described as the defining group of buildings at the village" and that local planning policies oppose development in the green belt. But he found in favour of the diocese.

The inspector meekly accepted the Church Commissioners' blinkered line about the "unsuitability" of such an historic building for continued use as a rectory, even though the would-be rector wants to live in it and, indeed, because he has a large family, will find its replacement inadequate and may well move on to a new parish in consequence.

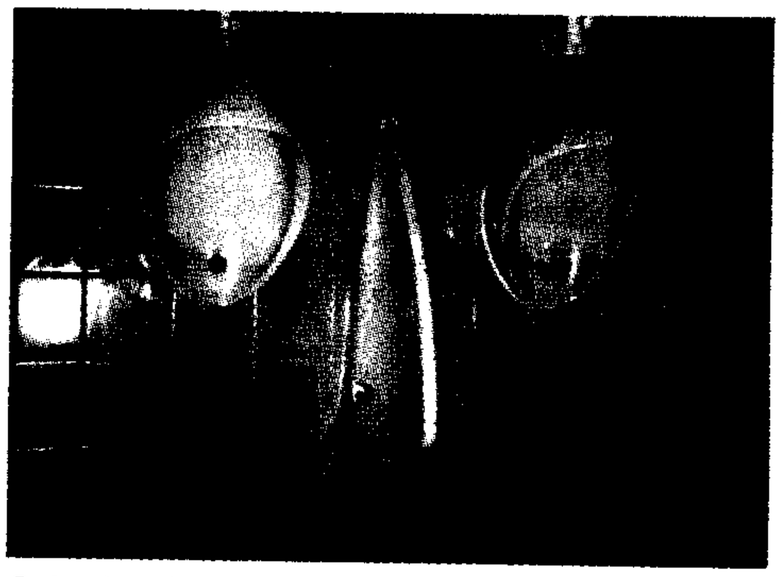
In thrall to narrowly utilitarian advice from a bunch of cosy accountants and lawyers – the very people whose financial brilliance led to the Church Commissioners' multi-million pound losses in property speculation in recent years – the Church of England has disposed of hundreds, probably thousands of old rectories and vicarages since the second world war and replaced them with nasty new suburban boxes which invariably disfigure the towns and villages where they are imposed.

We all know what happens. The old and usually neglected house – once at the heart of village life – is sold for a song to someone who repairs and modernises it and then sells it on for a huge profit. This is a process which benefits surveyors, architects, developers and estate agents – everyone, in fact, apart from the church in general and the parish in particular.

Penshurst Rectory will now be enjoyed by some well-heeled outsider rather than by a clergyman and his parishioners, while the village will be gratuitously spoiled by a new house nobody seems to want other than the Bishop of Rochester. Why?

'Piloti'

I-SPY *Gents' toilets, Uxbridge*



Submitted by Glenn Oldham. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

AFTER the farce of the last two Classical Brit Awards it's surprising that this sad and shabbily unreal event survives.

Cobbled together by record company executives to sell the likes of Charlotte Church and Russell Watson, it offers no more than token recognition to the genuine talent of the classical world, and no one takes it seriously. But, once again, the voting forms are out – sent unsolicited to luminaries of the music business, with the usual patronising letter that tells them how honoured they are to have been selected for membership of the so-called voting "academy".

As before, the voting is limited to a shortlist (compiled by unspecified hands and unrevealed procedures) that has so little to do with anything classical it's surreal. Nine of the ten possibilities for the Contemporary Music Award are film scores – *Harry Potter, Hannibal, Captain Corelli* et al – and the only one that isn't is a crossover disc by Karl Jenkins.

The appalling Russell Watson turns up again for Male Artist of the Year. The fabulously undistinguished Izzy – known, if at all, only for her previous appearances in the Brit awards – is down again for Young Classical Performer. And the Ensemble Award list features total non-entities like The Celtic Tenors alongside the ECO (for a film score) and the LPO (for Karl Jenkins).

Adding insult to injury, the honoured members of the "academy" are then invited to pay for their own tickets to the awards ceremony. Most of them, one suspects, will have better things to do that evening.

THE wires have been buzzing since Norman Lebrecht, a music writer on the *Telegraph*, was elevated to the dizzy heights of assistant editor, *Evening Standard*, with overall control of the paper's arts coverage.

Held in contempt by most of his colleagues, Lebrecht regards himself a serious critic but his greatest gift is for self-publicity. So it was entirely in character that he celebrated his new job by issuing to friends an email headed SMART CAREER MOVE in which he trumpeted his new powers, helpfully provided details of an obscure radio programme in which he could be heard discussing them, and congratulated himself for having wasted no time in sacking the two existing music critics on the *Standard*.

But it was naïve of Lebrecht to assume he *had* friends. His email has been forwarded the length and breadth of the music business, entertainingly amended and enlarged by vicious parodies from critics, agents, artists, concert-hall directors, BBC producers… all testifying to Lebrecht's spectacular unpopularity and threatening to close ranks against his regime on the *Standard*.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS BY BIRCH

This really is too much – it shows a complete lack of respect for people's sensibilities!
After all, certain things should be sacrosanct...
GUARDIAN ARTS
SHOCK AS BODY WORLDS SHOW OPENS
CORPSES AND BODY PARTS!
YUK! SAYS JONATHAN JONES
...like our reputation for outrage!
It does make beds, sharks and elephant dung look a bit tame...

GAY COPPER SHOCK

LEGAL NEWS

A DECADE after the *Eye* first alleged that John Stuart Condliffe was dishonestly overcharging his clients, the Cornish accountant has taken yet another of his former clients to court over an unpaid bill of £21,330 for three years' accounts.

In his witness statement to Truro county court, Robin Townsend, a washing machine repair man who was charged £400 a year by his previous chartered accountant (Condliffe lost this distinction when he became bankrupt) and who has been quoted £600-£700 a year by his present accountant, admitted that he was undergoing a tax investigation at the time, but stated that even so he has been advised that his bill should have been no more than around £1,000 a year.

Townsend said that after receiving an earlier bill for £5,287 he showed constant concern about costs, but Condliffe advised him he had no choice but to continue. "He warned of the dangers of dealing with the Inland Revenue, that they operated almost as a law unto themselves. They could take my home, they had powers of arrest with cells below the offices, and that the interview room doors had no handles on the inside. Although I felt that he was exaggerating, it was still unsettling, particularly for my family."

While Condliffe claimed in his answers to the expert witness in the case that Townsend's records were "totally unfilled and disordered", his former client disputed this saying: "My wife and I spent hours sorting and organising all invoices and statements by category, vendor and date. They were supplied in good order." Townsend also said in his statement that Condliffe had failed to give him an estimate of his costs and accused him of dishonestly overcharging for his services.

Despite his statement, Judge Samuels ruled that Townsend should pay Condliffe the reduced sum of £12,500, plus £2,000 interest and £6,000 towards his costs. On top of this Townsend has to pay his own costs of £2,000 plus £3,000 towards the expert witness report, making a grand total of £25,500. As a result of engaging Condliffe as an accountant he has now been forced to put his house on the market.

AT LAST things are looking up for the Conservative party. The *Eye's* old sparring partner, veteran libel lawyer Peter Carter-Ruck, told the *Times* on 12 March that he has switched his political allegiance from the Tories to the Lib Dems.

Iain Duncan Smith's only regret must be that Carter-Fuck didn't join Labour instead.

Letters

Private Eye

Public sector protest

Sir,

What a privileged position of omniscience Chris Hollebon (Letters, Eye 1049) occupies! How lucky he is to see through the self-interested scam of public sector work, when all around him are losing their head and leaving their cushy nursing and teaching jobs for the hugely more challenging world of burger-frying and junior office work! Why is he so stupid as to let us all know? I think we should be told. He should feather his own nest by taking several of these jobs and the generous pay they offer. It's so easy, after all, he could probably be a nurse, teacher and policeman all at once.

MATTHEW WRIGHT,

Oxford.

Sir,

Re: Mr Hollebon's letter castigating the NHS. Time was when our hospitals had their own kitchens, laundry and cleaning staff. Then the hospitals were spotless. But the Conservatives decided it would be better if cleaning, cooking and laundry were contracted out. Within a month, hospitals were noticeably dingy.

Yours faithfully,
MARGARET STEWART, MBCHB, Rtd,

Exeter.

Sir,

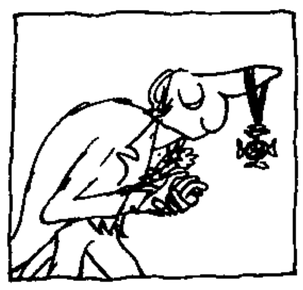
*With your extensive experiences of the libel law in this country, perhaps you would be kind enough to let me know whether I would be legally permitted, through the pages of your esteemed organ, to call Chris Hollebon a deluded, ignorant, self-righteous ****?*

As there is, no doubt, a deluge of mail heading your way following the publication of his letter, I have tried to keep my correspondence brief by editing out any actual facts or cogent arguments (in much the same way that Chris must have done). It seems that all I am left with is personal abuse. Oh well.

SEAN BEATTIE,

Rochester, Kent.

O·B·N



Yesterday, one Sunday paper had a list of the 300 most beautiful women "of all time". For some reason, it did not contain a picture of Joanna Trollope, who was photographed in another of the papers in a split skirt going all the way to the top of her beautiful thighs...

Joanna is easily more beautiful than many of the so-called lovelies of all time.

A.N. WILSON
Evening Standard

Nominated by David Farmbrough.

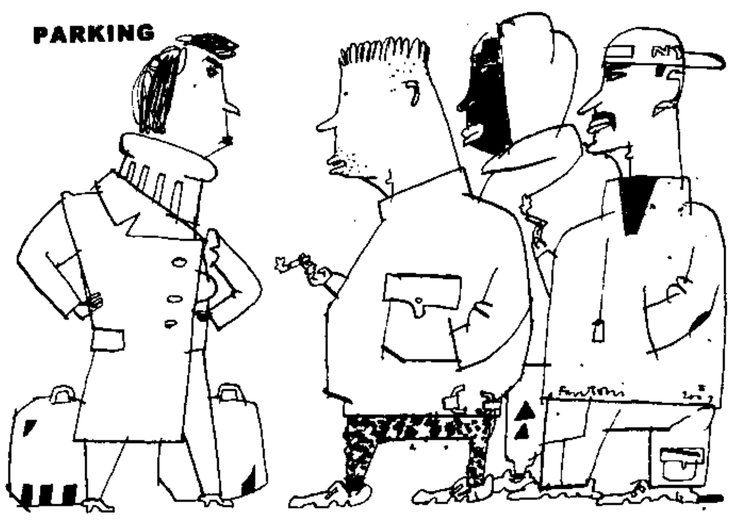
"Enjoy the rare opportunity to learn from, and be inspired by, Dr Henry Kissinger – one of the world's most respected individuals."

Institute of Directors website

Nominated by Dave Taylor.

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

Scenes You Seldom See (6)



"Had your car nicked? We'll get it back if it's the last thing we do"

Pilot wail

Sir,

Re: Hull of a mess – pilot error? (1049). For someone seeking to redress one-sided reporting Mr Broadwell seems to have reached a world record in the art.

Where to start? It's all wrong. He may live by the sea but does he have any maritime experience? It would appear not.

An inexperienced pilot is one who has not worked in his pilotage area very long. By any sane definition this applies to the new pilots. Years of experience at sea do not qualify you as a pilot, that's why they spend so long training.

Fog and 70mph (surely knots) of wind. A meteorological experience unknown to me in 24 years at sea. No experienced pilot would work in 70+ knots, it's too dangerous getting on and off vessels, let alone manoeuvring them.

Collisions, groundings and near misses are not normal occurrences, they are what you employ a pilot to avoid.

Anybody who regards Private Eye as scrupulously fair should be ignored as an idiot anyway.

Yours sincerely,
CAPT. P.A. CHALMERS,

Southwick.

PS: Yes, I am a pilot.

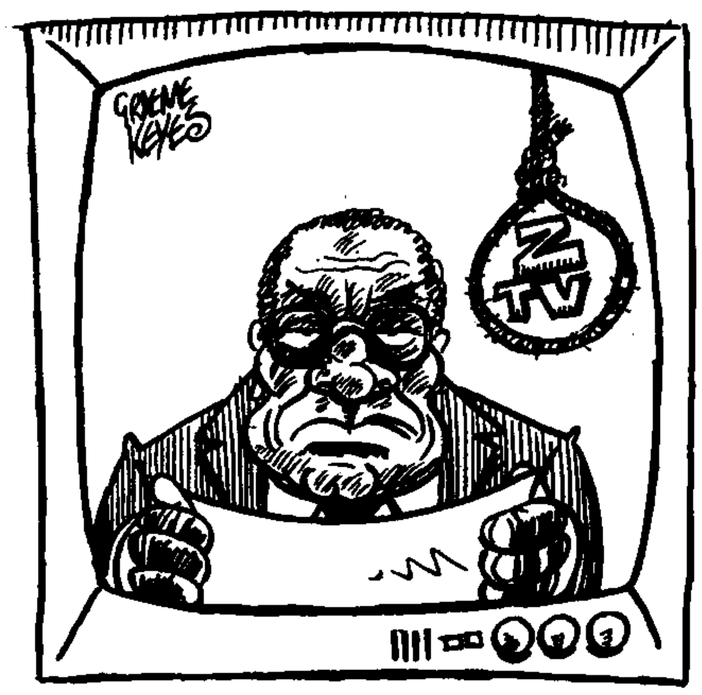
Show must not go on

Sir,

As someone who was in the audience at the Coliseum, I would like to add something to your excellent report on the ENO Valkyrie disaster of 23 February. About 10 minutes after the Brunnhilde conked out, we were still waiting to see what was going to happen, when a woman a few rows in front of us got up and walked out of the back of the stalls. It looked to us very like Anne Evans, Brunnhilde at Bayreuth, Berlin and all points west. We recognised her because we had seen her recently in Birmingham, when she sang some Wagner with the CBSO at Symphony Hall. Was she going to save the show? Alas, it was not to be. After another 10 minutes she returned to her seat and Mr Payne came on stage to say that since Brunnhilde didn't have much left to sing (a curious claim to say the least) they were going to cut all her stuff and pick up with Wotan's farewell. This seemed rather tough on the audience, bearing in mind the cost of the tickets. At the end of the show, Anne Evans happened to walk past us and I asked her if she had offered to stand in for the indisposed Kathleen Broderick. She laughed and said she had, but had been turned down. It was only later that it occurred to us that the powers that be may have given her the brush-off because she would only have shown up the incompetence of much of the other singing we were offered that night.

Yours sincerely,
DEREK HEWITT,

Birmingham.



"Here is the noose"

Anagram

Sir,

Reflecting on Robert Mugabe's comment that Britain is run by a Labour cabinet "full of gays", I note that the victorious Zimbabwean president's surname is a reworking of that well known expression, Buga Me! Is this in any way significant?

Yours,
B. HALL,
Chipping Ongar, Essex.

Food for thought

Sir,

With reference to John Nairn's letter "Down on the farmer" (Eye 1049) and his attack on Gumboot, it is clear that he is not himself a farmer or he would know that subsidies for crops requiring fertiliser are not paid by Price Support but by Area Payments (ie, £s per hectare not £s per ton), thus there is no added incentive "to produce more by means of additional fertiliser and pesticide".

Mr Nairn and others would do well to consider the £158 a head cost to taxpayers and consumers of agricultural support more as subsidy which reduces the cost of feeding themselves rather than one which lines the pockets of farmers, the large majority of whom are currently trading at a loss. The cost of the average weekly food bill in England expressed as a percentage of the average weekly wage is among the lowest in Europe. It is unbecoming for the likes of him to complain about farmers with their mouths full.

Yours sincerely,
ANDREW JEANS (FARMER),
Salisbury, Wilts.

Sir,

I was intrigued by John Nairn's reference to price support for farmers. I must be missing something. Five years ago I was selling feed wheat for £120/tonne. Today I can get £64.50. I have just been reading figures from the farm machinery manufacturer Claas which show a 3.5 tonne/acre crop of wheat at £65/tonne could give a profit of as much as £13 an acre. This would suggest that the price support mechanism only needs to reduce wheat prices by another £4 a tonne and the problem would be solved! All that environment-harming crop production would cease as the wicked farmers would all be bust.

Apparently the value going to farmers from the food consumed by the average person in this country comes to less than £200 a year. If we add the £158 of support this comes to just under £1 a day. Instead of wasting all this money on food you could smoke four fags a day for that.

JAMES COPE,
Blairgowrie.

Sir,

What bollocks John Nairn writes about so-called support for farmers (Down on the Farmer, Eye 1049). They don't squeeze every last ounce out of the land because they are living in luxury, but because they can't make ends meet. Small hill farmers are being driven to despair at having to sell whole lambs for the price of four lamb chops in the local supermarket.

Until the government forces supermarkets to pay farmers a fair proportion of their profits, more farmers will go under. And the toffs who want rural workers to support their fox-hunting marches are the same ones who run our supermarket chains. Talk about double standards.

JIM HUTCHON,
Chelmsford.

Those ABBCs in full

Sir,

It has always been an ambition of mine to be somewhat inaccurately slighted in Private Eye, so many thanks.

You picked out some of our ABCs which were down (although many of them better than their direct competitors). You left out those that were up. And in aggregate, BBC Magazines was up 2 percent – a better showing than, for instance, IPC or EMAP.

So fear not. We will be helping BBC Worldwide to return a record sum to the BBC for programme making.

Yours sincerely,
PETER PHIPPEN,
BBC Magazines.

Lookalike

Hoot **Tony**

Sir,

May I bring to your attention the Blairingly obvious resemblance of our very own P.M. Tony and Hoot Gibson, the '20s film star? Are they perchance related and, if so, should we not be informed?

B.E. DAVIES,
Hay-on-Wye, Herefordshire.

"You'll like the neighbours. We've got teachers one side and nurses on the other"

Learning the hard way

Sir,

At last, after 29 years as an avid reader of your splendid organ I have finally appeared in your pages – but only for the right reasons of course. Even better I get the chance to write in with the traditional letter explaining how you (Backbiter, last issue) got it wrong, at least in part.

Yes the ILA scheme as introduced by New Labour has been a shambles but only because incompetence ruined a potentially excellent concept. First the Department for Education and Skills introduce a scheme with absolutely no quality controls on the Training Providers who were supposed to deliver it. Then they pay the "expert and experienced" company CAPITA £50m to develop the software and administer the scheme. Finally CAPITA devise a system based on the idea that Training Providers with access to it will be accredited and trustworthy – so it does not have enough safeguards and fire walls.

End result? Basically all you had to do was fill one side of A4 with your name, address and the bank account number you wanted the government to pay the money into and you were away. No one would come and check how many computer training stations you had (if any) or how many qualified trainers you had (if any) or how satisfactory the training you provided (if any) was.

The government eventually realise that some scams and frauds are occurring and close the entire scheme down overnight, hitting all the legitimate companies badly, driving some into bankruptcy and causing many redundancies – also of course refusing any compensation at all.

None of this means that the ILA model was wrong from the start, just that it was appallingly badly handled.

Keep up the good work.

PAUL HOLMES,
Liberal Democrat MP for Chesterfield.

Sir,

As specialist registrars training in Liverpool to be epilepsy specialists, we applaud MD's concerns and support for greater emphasis on the diagnosis and treatment of epilepsy, as outlined in "Doing the rounds" on 8 February.

There were errors in MD's article. In particular, of six neurology specialist registrars in Liverpool, four are training to be epilepsy specialists (rather than none out of 20). Failure to gather good background information can lead to a misdiagnosis of epilepsy. It is fortunate for MD that his error has less significant consequences.

Yours sincerely,
TONY MARSON, JOHN-PAUL LEACH,
NAGHME ADAB, ANDREW NICOLSON,
The University of Liverpool.

Looking like mugs

Sir,

I read with considerable annoyance the offer of a free mug for new subscribers. Never mind the rest of us.

Then I read the article criticising David Mills during his time at HSBC for giving new mortgage customers cheaper deals than existing borrowers. Pot, kettle etc.

*More importantly, where's my free mug, you cheapskating bas****.*

Your faithfully,
A. VELDHUIZEN,
Leicester.

In memoriam

Sir,

The cartoon on page 14 (1049) showing Chuck Jones' headstone with the epitaph "That's All Folks" is funny – almost as funny as the real headstone of Mel Blanc (the voice of Bugs Bunny et al) in Los Angeles' Hollywood Forever Cemetery which actually does say, "That's All Folks!"

LIAM KILLEN,
Via email.

"The first fuckyou of Spring"

Epilepsy: out of hiding

Sir,

All praise to Private Eye for bringing into the open a "hidden condition" (Epilepsy & the NHS, 1048).

Last summer, our clever, loving son Matthew died, aged just 29, of an epileptic seizure. He had had his first seizure at 15 and was put on medication. After being seizure-free for five years, he came off medication.

Out of the blue, in May last year, Matthew had another seizure. His own doctor, despite his history of epilepsy, did not refer him to a specialist, did not prescribe medication, and did not tell him about the risks of epilepsy so that he could make informed choices about his lifestyle. Two months later Matthew died of a little-known syndrome called Sudden Unexpected Death in Epilepsy (SUDEP), where a mostly young and healthy person with epilepsy dies suddenly and no other cause is revealed.

In the UK in 1998 there were 978 epilepsy deaths. Some of these were due to accidents but a large number estimated at 500 annually do not have a clear cause. In that year 195 people died from AIDS/HIV and there were 294 cot deaths (SIDS). There is little or no publicity about epilepsy deaths.

A website called "Epilepsy: The Information" is currently being built and should be up and running by May. Its aim is to give straightforward, truthful facts about epilepsy based on the belief that "Education and Knowledge saves Lives". We hope it will play a part in helping the growth of understanding and openness about the condition.

Yours, with thanks,
KRISTINA HARVEY,

Tiverton.

Word games

Sir,

The cartoon in Eye 1049 entitled "Naval Scrabble" shows three men playing Scrabble with tiles accurately depicting flags from the International Code of Signals. On the board are the names MARY, HILARY and SHEILA. Unfortunately for the cartoonist, proper nouns are not allowed under Scrabble rules.

Yours,
MALCOLM YOUD,

Via email.

Man on a train

Sir,

Sorry (no I'm not) to nitpick, but Kelvin Hopkins is the MP for Luton North, not Luton West, which doesn't exist (Eye 1049). I met him on a train a few weeks ago and he gave me his card, so I know I'm right – but I promise not to sue.

JOHN WELFORD,

Nuneaton, Warks.

Morse ode

Sir,

Please inform Endeavour J. Thribb that Inspector Morse's theme tune was actually

da-da
da-da-da
dit-da-dit
dit-dit-dit dit.

The theme tune quoted in Mr Thribb's tribute was actually that of the lesser known series, Inspector SOS.

Regards,
JEREMY W BROWN,

Via email.

Colemanballs balls-up

Sir,

Whether she knew it or not, Cate Blanchett (Colemanballs, Eye 1049) was correct and Mr Walton was wrong. "Semite" is derived from "son of Shem" and therefore includes Jews, Arabs and several other ethnic groups. So, just as it is (surprisingly) possible for an orphan to have a living parent, it is also possible to like Jews and yet be anti-semitic. Perhaps you should start a "Dumb Eye" column.

Yours pedantically,
(DR) DAVID J. FISHER,

Cardiff.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

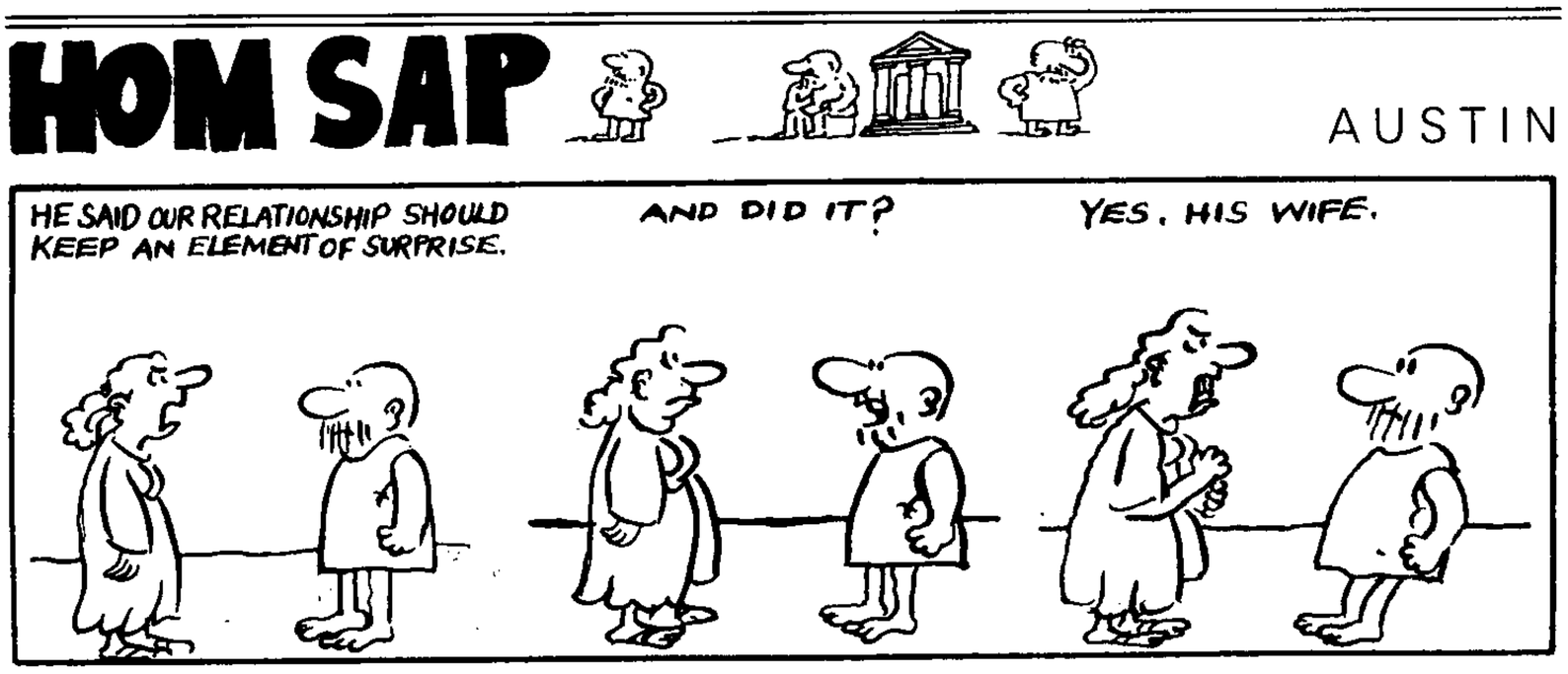
"And a goal at this stage could, quite literally, be worth its weight in gold."
BBC World Service
(Christian Anderson)

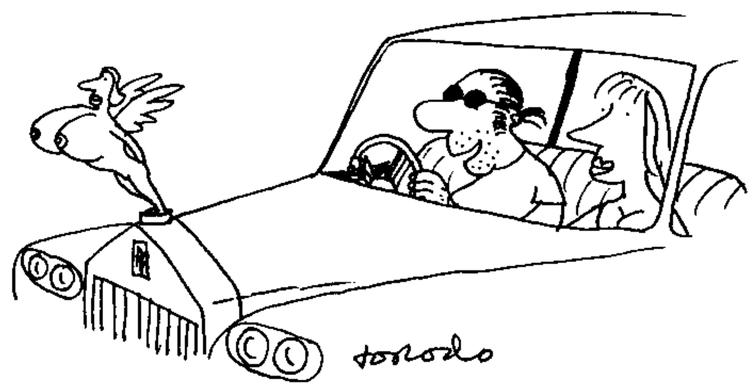
"In the last race favourite-backers would certainly have had their hearts in their chests."
DEREK THOMPSON, Channel 4
(Dr Mark Garnett)

"We have slammed shut the revolving door we found open."
BERTIE AHERN at Party Conference
(Lochlann Gallagher)

"...just inching the bar up centimetre by centimetre"
Sports Commentator, BBC1
(Colin Woodhouse)

"That was an impressive run by the two English runners – one running for England and the other for Wales."
DAVID COLEMAN, BBC
(Justin McKeown)





"Yes, porn's been good to me"

Letter from **Rio de Janeiro**
from Our Own Correspondent

JUST before he was to start his first four-year term in office in 1995, our President Fernando Henrique Cardoso promised us his priorities would be fighting "inflation, inflation and inflation".

He succeeded and we gave him a second term because of it, a period he told us he would use to focus on "education, education, education". But so busy has our scholarly leader been in honouring his pledges, that it seems to have escaped the government's notice that violent crime has now spiralled so out of control that more people are dying on our streets than in many a war zone.

In grim and grimy São Paolo, for example, more than 4,500 people were murdered in the first nine months of last year, a higher death rate even than that of Bogota, capital of conflict-ravaged and drug-addled Colombia. In the first week of February alone, one of our leading politicians was murdered, a crusading prosecutor gunned down in broad daylight and a gang of police officers caught kidnapping drug traffickers.

The situation in our urban areas is out of control, with murder, kidnappings, assaults and other petty crimes becoming as synonymous with Brazil as samba, football and bikini-clad babes. Criminals who once specialised in bank robbery and cargo theft have turned their attentions to kidnapping – not of the expensive and fiercely well-protected super-rich, but anyone who looks like they might have a jewellery box at home, a couple of hundred *reais* in their ATM machine or a car with a few shiny hubcaps worth reselling.

The government did unveil a £500m programme in 2000 to deal with the collapse of law and order. But in our complicated and corrupt federal system, the flow of money has been erratic and the results unimpressive. In the first year individual states received barely half the resources they had been promised, improving only slightly last year. The central government's caution, though, perhaps has a point: in Ceara state, police used their money to buy eight air conditioners; in Maranhão they purchased 50 bicycles; and in Espirito Santo officers got 200 mats for their martial arts classes.

We have taken to the streets to demonstrate and show our disgust at the government's failure, but our leaders have responded by passing the buck. The Cardoso administration says congress won't pass laws and calls on the state and local authorities that have jurisdiction over police to take action. State governors say the country's lamentable justice system allows prosecutors to set free too many criminals and they are calling on congress to pass laws unifying the rival civil and military police forces. Prosecutors say they are only following the letter of the law and want the government and congress to reform the penal code and give them more resources.

Right now there are more than 100 bills related to public security stalled in congressional commissions, but with the head of the senate still recovering from plastic surgery and the head of the chamber of deputies spending most of his time dating models, we should not be surprised that nothing is being done. It isn't much consolation but at least Cardoso knows how we feel. His car was stolen last year and the year before that his apartment complex was broken into.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

o "Boys have a hymen, just like girls," Reggie Khumalo told reporters in the Durban township of KwaMashu, "and that is how we can conduct our virginity tests on young men. There is white lacy skin on the foreskin, and if the foreskin slips away easily during inspection, that means the hymen has gone. But if it is sore and hard to move, then it means the boy is still a virgin."

Speaking on behalf of Isivivane Sama Siko (a body promoting African traditional culture), Khumalo explained why he was training teams of older men to perform the tests. "We must try to prevent young boys from abusing themselves, and from catching sexually transmitted diseases. Our testers have various ways to tell if a boy is pure or impure. Apart from looking for the hymen, we check for a certain vein. If it can be seen, it means he is a virgin. We also look at how the boy urinates. If the stream goes straight up in the air, he is a virgin, but if the urine sprays, he has had sex. We also check the colour of his knees, because purple knees mean he is not a virgin. Finally, we ask the boy if he is a virgin. But we rarely take notice of the answer."

Khumalo's views were challenged by Dr Merwyn Jacobson, who declared: "There is no scientific basis for this. Boys have no hymen. There is no 'white part' round the foreskin. There is no vein that disappears after sex. How a boy urinates depends on anatomical variations. And you don't have sex on your knees." But Khumalo replied by advising his audience to "forget about doctors. They don't know what they are talking about. If they say the boys don't have a hymen, then what do they call the white part around the foreskin?" *(The Star [South Africa], 31/1/02. Spotter: William A Martinson)*

— o —

o "Butchers shops have tougher hygiene regulations than funeral parlours," Steve Parr of the Australian Funeral Directors Association admitted to a press conference in Sydney, "and at the moment we're the only people policing the industry. Some people will do all sorts of thing to cut costs, and this is just the latest example."

Parr was speaking after a Sydney family had exhumed a coffin supposedly containing the remains of a young male relative. "Inside, they found the body of a hundred-year-old woman, along with several bricks and a five-litre container of liquid to make the coffin heavier. In defence of the funeral parlour, the man had been accidentally cremated, and they were just trying to cover up the mistake. Even so, what they did was unprofessional, to say the least.

"But on a wider point, it's wrong that there are no nationwide regulations covering the transportation and treatment of bodies, to safeguard against the spread of infectious diseases. Bodies are often not cremated for ten or fifteen days, during busy periods, and something has to be done. Either we start burning more than one body at a time, or we go back to the old days when bodies were stored in private homes. All the signs are that that's the way we're going." *(Brisbane Courier Mail, 11/12/01. Spotter: Norm Reynolds)*

— o —

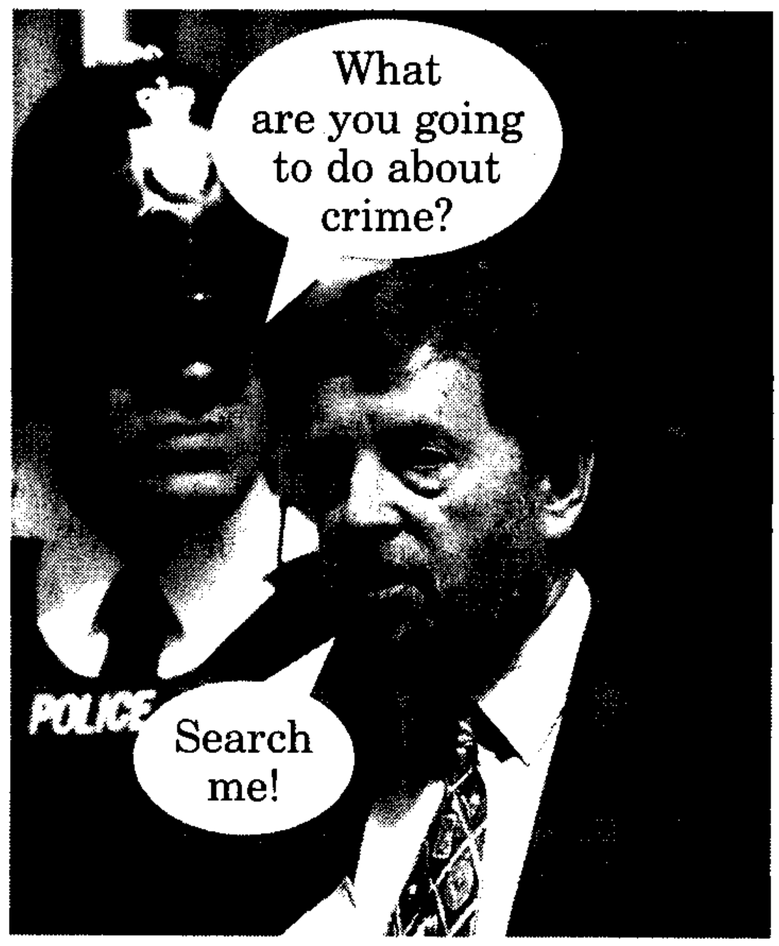
o *"I made sure no one was in the street before I jumped, because I didn't want to hurt anyone," Lee Chen-fan told the Small Claims Court in Hong Kong. "I meant to die, and instead of saving me, the car upset my plan. It was parked there illegally, and that is why I refuse to pay compensation to the owner."*

Ms Lee was contesting a claim from Chung Kai-chiu, who was demanding $25,700 from her

for damaging his car during a failed suicide leap. "I have lived in that building for ten years," she said, "and know very well that there are no parking spaces on that street. The car shouldn't have been there, and its roof broke my fall and both my hips. Anyway, I have no money to pay him. My husband was declared bankrupt last year, and we are penniless. That is why I was trying to commit suicide. I need a wheelchair."

The case was adjourned until April 11th. (South China Morning Post, 8/2/02. Spotter: Liz Zass)

BLUNKETT'S NEW PLAN



Late News

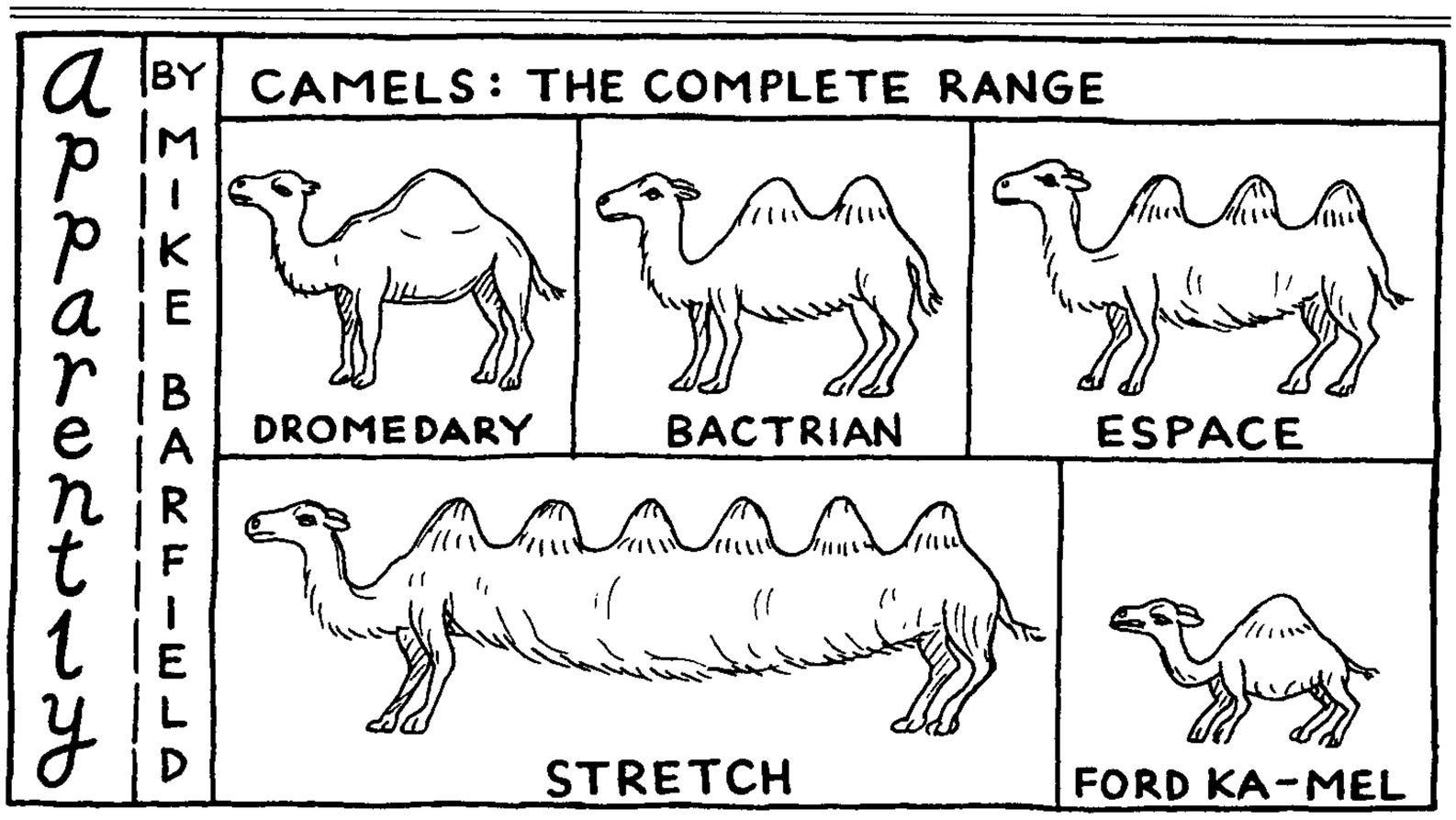
BLUNKETT — 'MORE POLICE ON STREETS'

by **PC World**

THE Home Secretary David Blunkett says that as a direct result of his initiatives, thousands more police are being seen on the streets of Britain.

"Yes, they're all carrying placards and chanting for me to be sacked," said a delighted David... *(Cont'd. p. 94)*

"Then, of course, there's the overtime, the red tape and the ridiculous cost of housing, not to mention backache from all the sitting around..."



A CRACKDOWN on auto crime in East Cleveland is driving thieves into the long ars of the law.

East Cleveland Herald & Post

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S WMD –
WOMAN OF MASS DESTRUCTION!

■ ALI G!?? Arenchajussick-ofhim??!?! Everywhere you go there he is with his beanie hat and his silly beard a-glarin' and a-starin' at you!!?!?! OK, so he pretends to be black – how about pretending to be funny for a change!?!?!? You're Ali washed up (Geddit???!) *Is it because I is boring??!?* Yes!!!! Talk about boyakashingin!!?!? Geddit????!

■ BEANIE HATS off to Ali G?!?! He's the funniest man in da hood, as we say in the Fleet Street massive!!?!?! Respect, Ali?? You've got mine!!?! I'd like to be your Julie, make no da mistake!!!? Chillin', blink blink rappin' Shaggy... er... *(That's enough da. Ed.)*

■ *DIDYA shed a tear at li'l Liza Minnelli's all-star wedding in romantic downtown Ground Zero??!? I did, Mister, and I'm not ashamed to say so!!!?!*

Fourth time lucky, Liza, cos, as the song says, life is like a cabaret, and yours is still the best in town!!!?! You're an icon to us all, just like your Mum – altogether now, "Somewhere over the rainbow..."

■ I CRIED at ludicrous Liza's wedding – with laughter!!?!?! Roll up, roll up for the freak show starring Michael Jackson as the Zombie and Elizabeth Taylor as the Fat Lady!!?!?! Check the spelling Mr Sub-Editor – it's Liza with a z-z-z-z!!! (Geddit???!?)

PS. See you at the Divorce Court, Liza. All together now, "We're off to see the lawyers..."

■ THREE cheers for Britain's first drug-taking gay copper. He's the guy who's been a-puffin' and a-poofin' all round London!!!!? Commander Paddick to you, stoopid!?!?!? I say we're lucky to have a gutsy lawman who's not afraid to break the law... er... *(That's enough. Ed.)*

HERE they are, Glenda's Mad March Munchkins!!!

● **Peter Wilby** – He's the dreamy editor of the New Statesman!!! Yu can stagger round to my place, Peter, and see my circulation rise!?!???

● **Lakshmi Mittal** – Come and show me what your steel is made of – and you don't have to give me any money!!!!?!!

● **Chris Woodhead** – I know I'm a bit old for you, but you can teach me some lessons anytime!??!?!

Byeeee!!!

Advertisement

Exclusive serialisation in the Times – because the book is published by HarperCollins and no one else will run it.

WITCHCRAFT

by Margaret Thatcher
(as told to Michael Fishwitch)

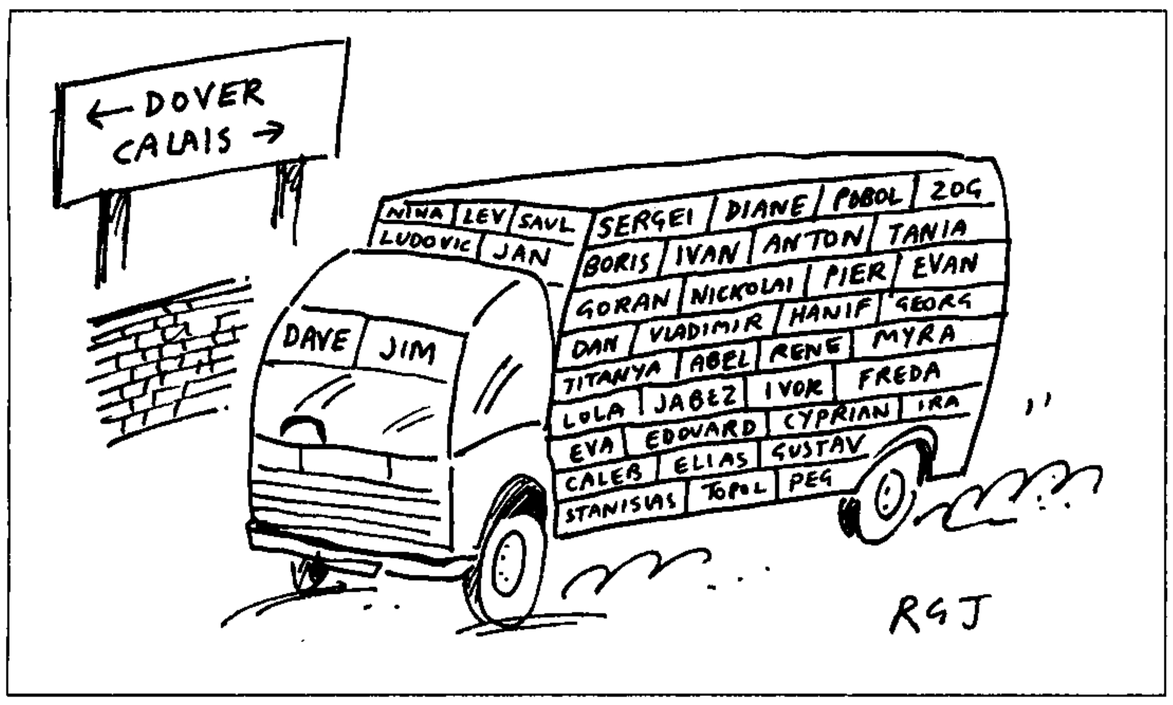
Monday
How to cast a spell on an entire nation

Tuesday
How I privatised the broomstick industry

Wednesday
How Enoch Powell tried to send my black cat home

Thursday
How I turned Ken Livingstone into a newt

Friday
How I got a huge pile of gold from Rupert Murdoch



COMING SOON

HIGHGROVE PARK

PG

AN old-fashioned lavish country house drama where a group of ill-assorted aristocrats, nouveaux riches and showbiz types gather for a weekend at the invitation of their host, the eccentric Prince Charles with his mistress Camilla Parker Bowles.

Among the weekend guests are a famous poet (Andrew Motion), an obscure novelist (Robert Harris), a pianist and crooner (Jools Holland) and an elderly peeress (Dame Helena Kennedy).

Why have they all gathered together? What secrets lurk beneath their civilised exteriors?

The rich comedy turns to tragedy when all the guests are found bored to death in the library. The murder weapon seems to be an old record of the Goon show still playing on the desk.

Inspector Knacker (Stephen Fry) is confronted by one of the most baffling mysteries of his career.

Why have all these people accepted an invitation from Prince Charles?

Cast In Full

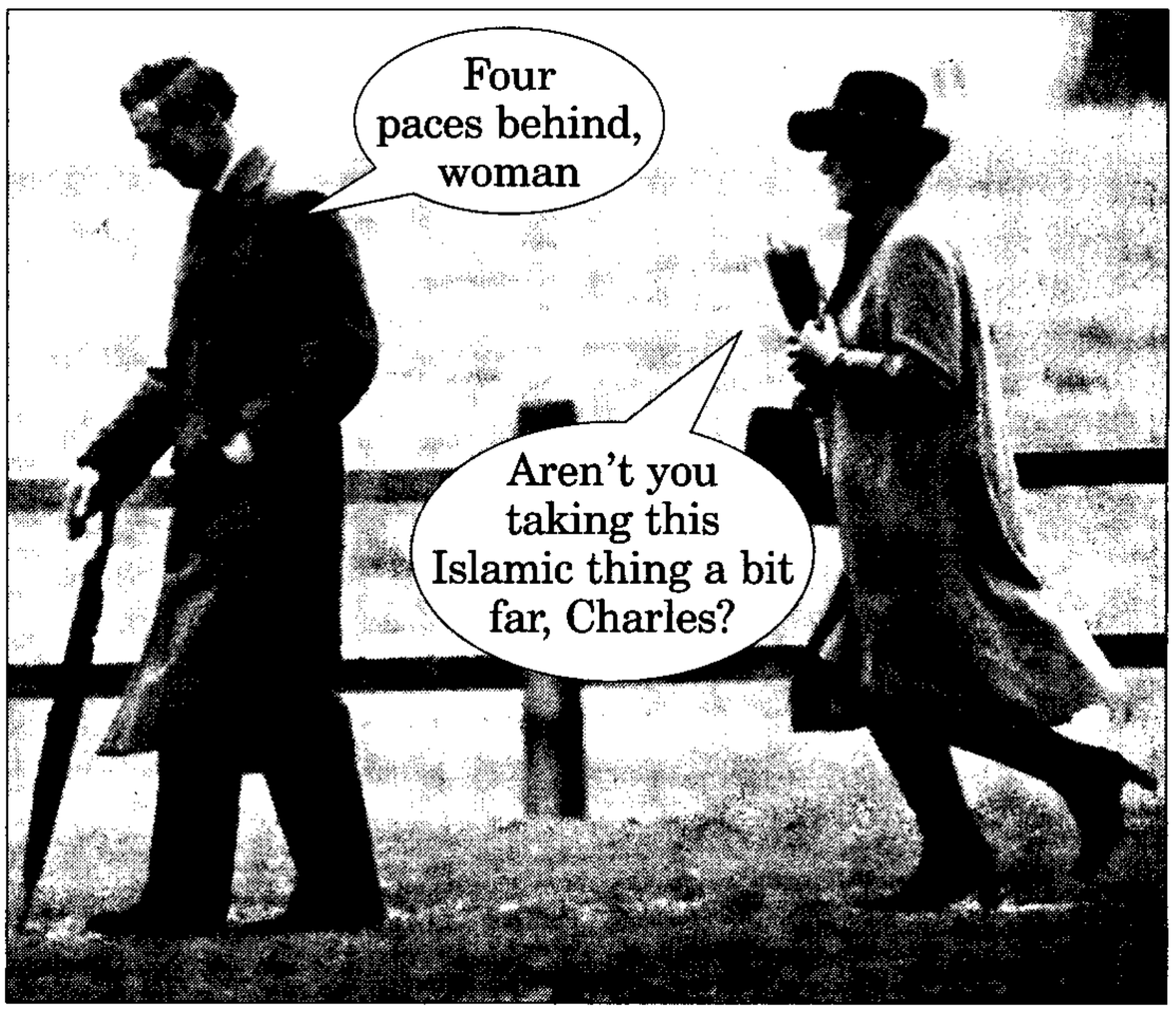
PRINCE CHARLES	Michael Gambon
CAMILLA PARKER BOWLES	Dame Judi Dench
ANDREW MOTION	Charles Dance
JOOLS HOLLAND	Ivor Novello
DAME HELENA KENNEDY	Maggie Smith
ROBERT HARRIS	Alan Bates

(That's enough cast. Ed.)

NOW SHOWING AT THE FOLLOWING GNOMEONS

■ GOSFORD PARK ■ WIDDECOMBE FAIR
■ WOODHEAD ■ MANDELSON WEST
■ EDWARD HEATH ■ ARDENT END

(That's enough cinemas).



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

Well, here we are, having come a long way on our Lenten journey, and it is a very good time to take stock of where we have been, and even more, where we are hoping to go to.

I think the first thing we have to do, at this stage, is to get rid of all the baggage that's going to make our journey more difficult.

What are you thinking of, Vicar? you ask. I'll tell you. We don't want any more talk of such things as Mr Mittal (who is not my friend) or Mrs Moore, or Mr Enron, or Mr Byers.

I'm going to take a leaf out of my predecessor Rev. Major's book, and draw a line under the whole lot of them!

Now, don't you already feel that things are getting better? That there's a new spirit of hope in the air?

So where do we go from here? I'll tell you! We look upwards. We look forwards and not backwards!

You see, what I'm offering you is a kind of road map to the future! We all need a road map on our journey. Otherwise you can get lost! And, hey, aren't there a lot of lost people out there? I think there are!

But a road map on its own is not much use, unless you've got someone to read that map and tell you what it's about!

And that's where I come in! Because it's my job to tell you where we're going, and how we're going to get there!

When you travel on my way (the Third Way, if you remember!), using my map, you'll find that the road leads fast and straight to the future!

You won't find any road closures, or traffic cones, or tailbacks to hold you back in the past!

What I am offering you is what I call "Phase Three" of our journey!

So what does that mean?

Let me spell it out. P-H-A-S-E T-H-R-

Thanks to local artist, Mr de la Nougerede, for this charming picture of the Vicar in his sponsored surplice! What a pity he has decided not to wear it any more!

E-E. And what does that stand for? It's obvious, isn't it?

We have had Phases One and Two, and that's what we're drawing a line under!

But, hey, I wouldn't want anyone to think that we haven't come a long way already on our journey from the past to the future!

Just remember how things used to be in the harsh and heartless days when Deaconess Thatcher ruled the roost in this parish!

Goodness me, how different it all now looks!

As I walk around the parish, I see signs everywhere of how fast things are changing in a more hopeful way!

I see daffodils springing up by the roadside! I see blossom on the trees. I see more and more women at our bus stops! I see smiling gay couples, free to walk through our streets without being gunned down!

And it all brings to mind the words of that unforgettable hymn of thanksgiving by St Satchmo, "I see trees of green, red roses too, I see them bloom for me and you, and I think to myself, it's a wonderful world"!

Isn't that a vision worth journeying towards? I'll say it is!

Yours, Tony

Thanks very much to Mr Mandelson for his help in compiling the above. His contribution is, as ever, invaluable and his idea about "the third phase" just shows how important it is that he returns to the team for "the third time"! T.B.

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

Some of us on the PCC are desperately worried at the way the Vicar seems prepared to support the belligerent and highly un-Christian views of the Rev. Dubya. If things go on like this, I for one will have no choice but to

Yours sincerely,
MRS CLARE SHORT,
The Oxfam Shop,
High Street.

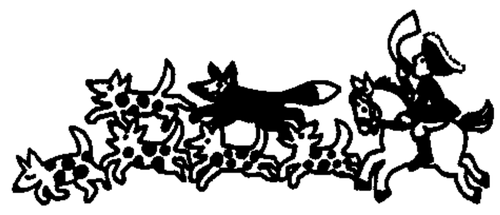
The editor reserves the right to cut all letters from members of the PCC who are threatening to resign because of what the Vicar's up to.

A Special Message From the Rev. Dubya Bush, Church of the Seventh Day Morons, Washington

Brothers and Sisters over there in Grand Britain!

I invite y'all to join with me in the great fight against the Evil One, whoever and wherever he may be! For remember, the Devil has many guises! One minute he is hiding in a cave, like some goddamned, pesky racoon. The next minute he has a moustache and he is sitting in some palace in Baghdad. But my message is clear to him and every one of you. The U.S. Cavalry is coming! And I want y'all over there in little ol' England town to join me in our mission to kick ass in the name of the Lord. The end is nigh and it'll be a lot nigher if I have my way! Amen and Alleluia!

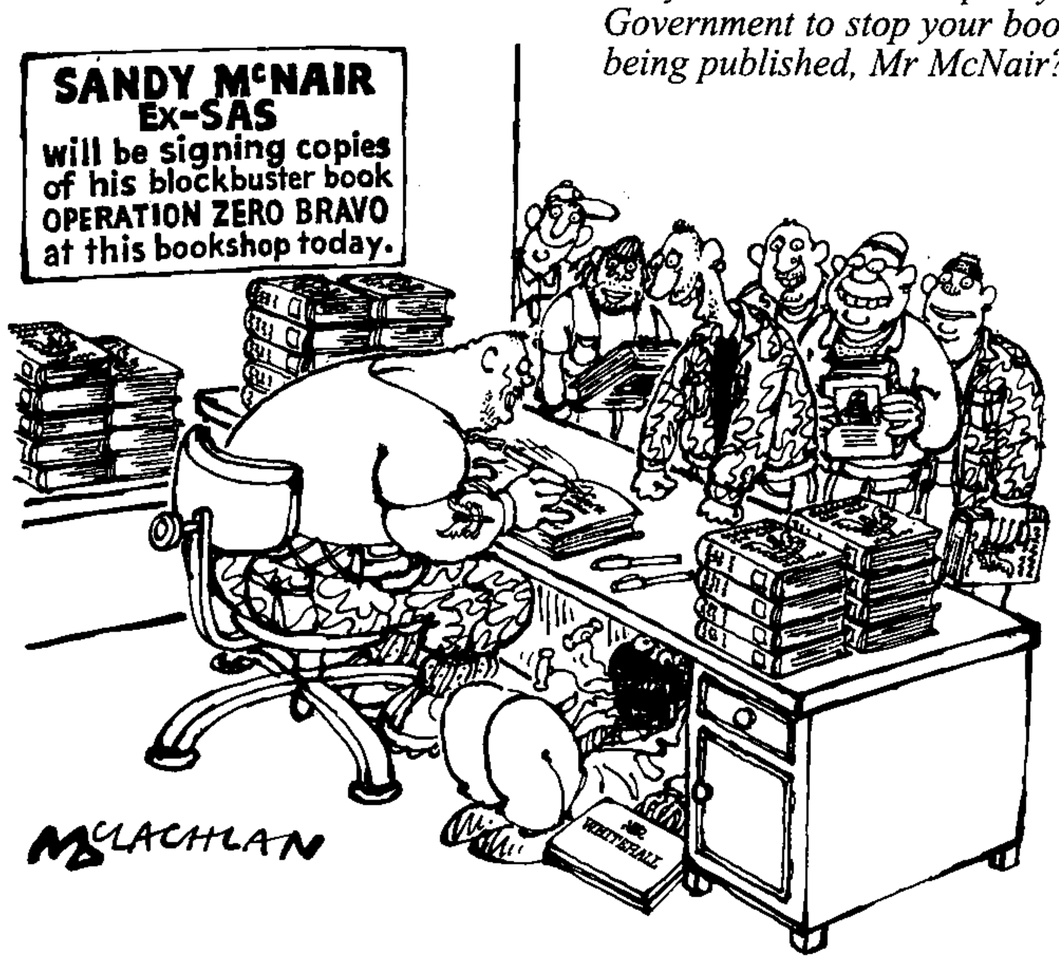
The Vicar continued his series of Lenten talks last week with "Foxhunting – The Middle Way"



■ THERE was a very good turn-out to hear the Vicar outline his views on what he called "The most important issue facing mankind today". In the old days, he said you were either for or against hunting. But he wanted to move on from that old-fashioned polarised thinking. He proposed a Third Way, which would be neither pro nor anti, but what he called "Pranti", from the Greek "prantos" meaning "a man sitting on the fence".

This third phase in the development of the hunting debate will make everyone happy, said the Vicar.

When it came to questions afterwards, Rev. Blair said that he was very sorry but he had to catch a plane to Barcelona to see his new friend Monsignor Silvio Mussolini to discuss their continuing friendship and agreement about the "right way" to do things! A.C.



"Any last minute attempts by the Government to stop your book being published, Mr McNair?"

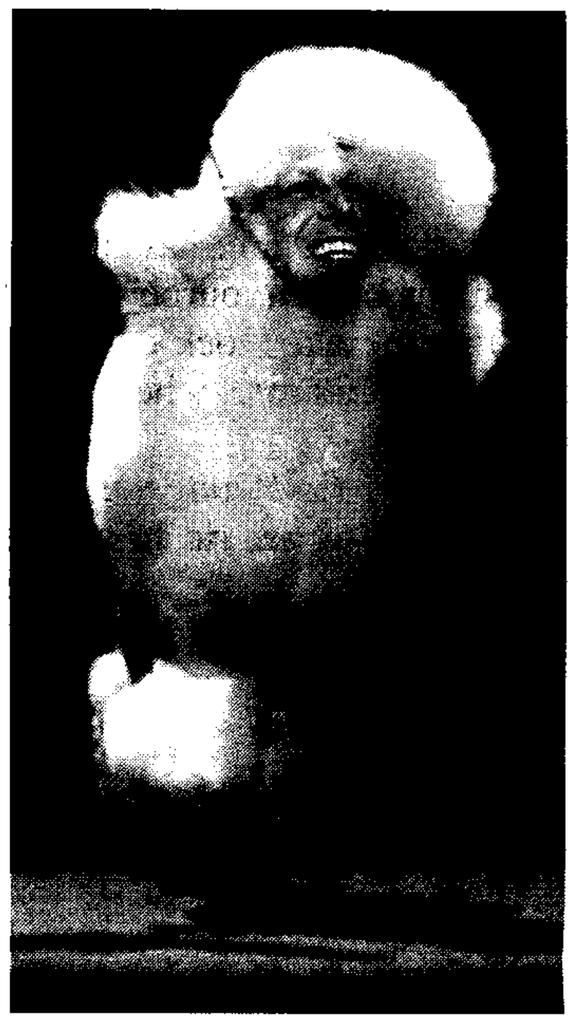
FOREIGN POODLE WINS CRUFTS

by Our Canine Correspondent
Jack Russell

FOR THE first time Crufts Best of Breed has been won by a poodle with a foreign owner – after Tony Blair triumphed for his U.S. owner George W. Bush.

"Tony's incredibly easy to handle," said a jubilant Mr Bush as he mounted the podium. "He never questions one of my orders, rolls over on command and he loves jumping through hoops for me.

"But no matter how much he sits up and begs, I'm not going to be reversing my decision on those steel tariffs."



Evening Standard Friday, 22 March, 2002

Sue McGhastly

Remembrance of Past Glories

IT'S exactly two weeks today since I stepped from the most important job in broadcasting, being one of the presenters on the BBC's agenda-setting current affairs flagship, the Today programme. I don't mind telling you, I do miss it. Sitting in the taxi on the way to the studio, walking up the stairs, going through the door, walking across the room, sitting down in my familiar place, some colleague handing me a welcome plastic beaker of piping hot tea. Yes, those were the days!

Worse Than McKay

I STILL haven't got used to the idea that I am now a top newspaper columnist instead of being the most respected presenter in the history of radio. Every morning when I sit down at my desk I am confronted with a blank sheet of paper. Except that, of course, nowadays, in the age of computers and the internet, it's a blank screen. And I don't mind admitting that, when I see that blank space facing me, I am gripped with terror. How am I going to fill it? I ask myself.

Pastures New

☐ *ONE of the benefits of not having to get into a studio at 4 o'clock in the morning is that I can now go to bed later. No longer do I have to turn out the light at 6 o'clock in the evening. I can now please myself! I can choose to go to bed at 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock or even 11 o'clock!*

© *Wadleytripe Productions, Evening Standard, London.*

THE SUN SAYS

Crime and Punishment

WE GIVE our full backing to the comments of Met Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens about the deficiencies of the criminal justice system.

How can we live in a country where crims are treated like royalty?

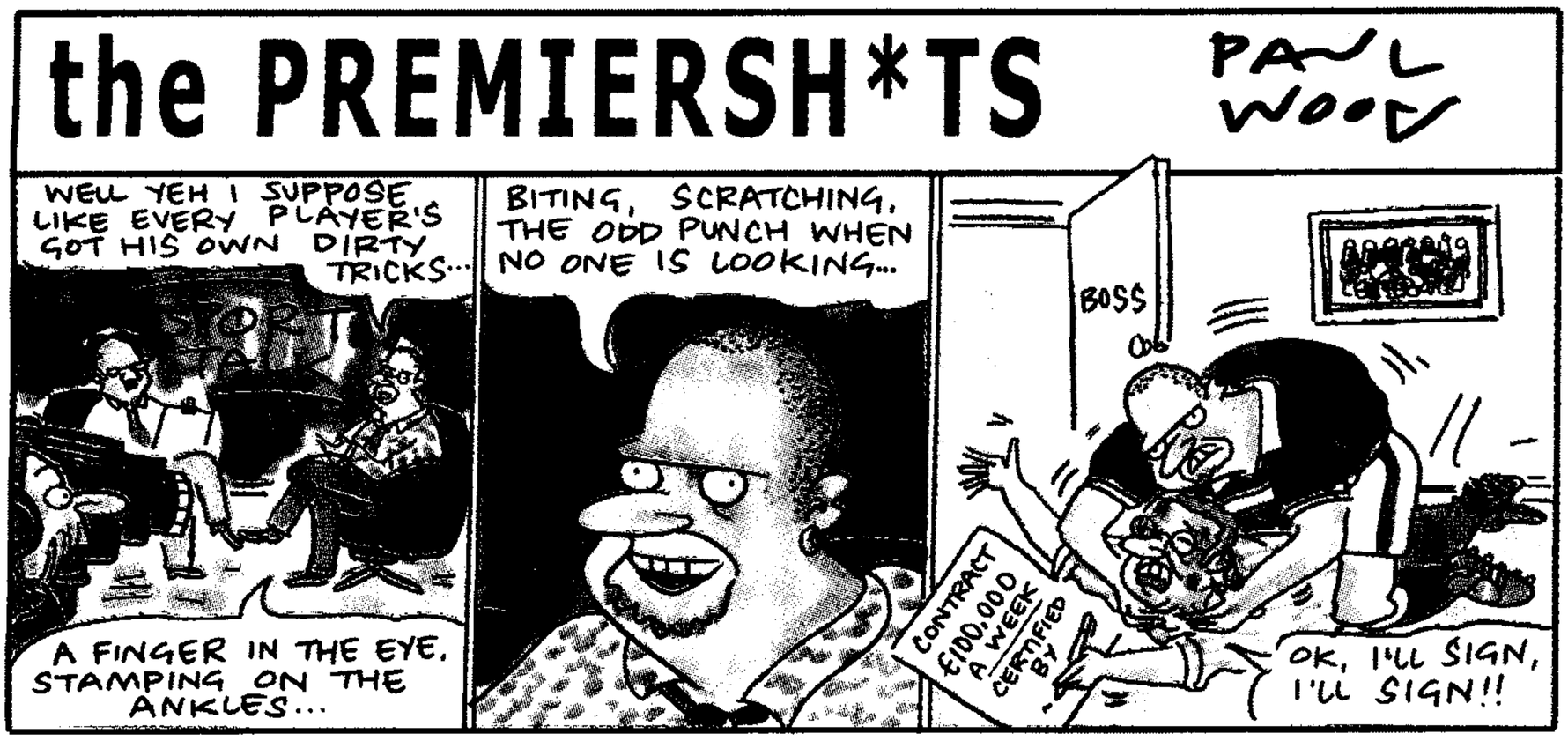
The culture that celebrates the villain, turning them into some sort of folk here, whilst totally forgetting the suffering of their victims must be stamped out.

Not on other pages

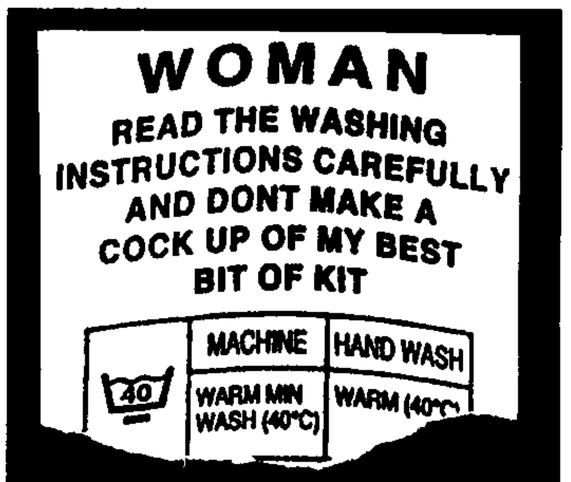
- **Remember the day we flew dear old Ronnie Biggs home to Britain? 8**
- **Remember how much money we paid his family? 14**
- **That Sun campaign to free dear old Ronnie Biggs from prison 18**

the PREMIERSH*TS

PAUL WOOD


WELL YEH I SUPPOSE LIKE EVERY PLAYER'S GOT HIS OWN DIRTY TRICKS...
SOFT
A FINGER IN THE EYE, STAMPING ON THE ANKLES...
BITING, SCRATCHING, THE ODD PUNCH WHEN NO ONE IS LOOKING...
BOSS
CONTRACT £100,000 A WEEK CERTIFIED BY
OK, I'LL SIGN, I'LL SIGN!!

WOMAN
READ THE WASHING INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY AND DONT MAKE A COCK UP OF MY BEST BIT OF KIT



Washing instructions, lycra cycling shorts

MONDAY CLASSIC
- £2.50 with tea and biscuits
TEA WITH MUSSOLINI (PG)
1.00pm

Advertisement, Craven Herald

What You Missed

1953

THE WAY WE WERE

(as seen on all TV channels)

(BLACK and white footage of grim Northern-style town with factory chimneys, men in cloth caps and street urchins playing hop-scotch on cobbled streets)

Narrator *(for it is some terrible actor)*: Britain in the post-war years was a very black and austere place. The war had left the country bankrupt and exhausted. The average wage was 18/6 a week in old money and most families could barely afford to eat.

(Shot of very old man wearing yellow socks sitting in armchair in London club)

Lord Deedes *(for it is he)*: Everyone sheemsh to forget that there wash shtill cheeshe rationing in 1953. You were only allowed half an ounce of cheeshe a week, per pershon. Thatsh not a lot of cheeshe, if you're fond of cheeshe, which I am.

(Old newsreel footage of women in headscarves queueing outside shop with notice reading "SORRY NO CHEESE TODAY")

Pathé-type Commentator: Housewives queued in vain all over Britain as cheese deliveries from America failed to materialise. So for the ladies, it was a case of "hard cheese"!

But never mind, soon the King will be dead and we can have a Coronation to cheer us all up!

Narrator: Then in February 1952 came the grim news.

(Shot of black-edged news placard reading "THE KING IS DEAD". Cut to man in pin-striped suit sitting in agreeable book-lined study)

Lord Bore *(Constitutional expert)*: The extraordinary thing about the British constitution is that the very moment a monarch dies, in this case the late King, at that very second his heir becomes King, or in this case Queen. Just like that! In the twinkling of an eye! Amazing! Just imagine, she went to bed a Princess and, sometime in the night, she mysteriously became the Queen! Could I have my fee in cash, please? Spot of bother with the wine merchant, you understand.

Narrator: But it wasn't all fun and games! Sorry, I'll do that bit again. It wasn't all doom and gloom! Suddenly the dark clouds parted, and a dazzling ray of sunshine lit up the bleak landscape of post-war, austerity-shrouded... oh no, I've done that bit. Suddenly Britain had a new young Queen and everyone agreed that it was the dawn of a new Elizabethan age.

(Cut to extremely dull-looking academic in library)

Ben Pimlott *(for it is he)*: It was the dawn of a new Elizabethan age. The dark clouds of post-war austerity rolled away, and suddenly there was something to cheer about.

(Black and white footage of Coronation. Golden coach, radiant Queen, Westminster Abbey, Peers in robes, Zadok the Priest, you know the stuff. Posh woman in chintzy drawing room with dogs)

Lady Pamela Ghastly *(for it is she)*: The Coronation was the most tremendous fun. We all had to get up terribly early, to be at the Abbey by half-past five. And you couldn't go to the loo, even if you were bursting. Some of the peers got frightfully hungry and began to eat their coronets. It was frightfully funny. And then, when we got home, we found all our servants and estate workers had been watching the whole thing on a little television set which we'd bought specially for them. They'd enjoyed it all so much. And, you know, one of them had been waving at us all day, thinking that we could see him! Ha, ha, ha!

Narrator: But it wasn't just the gentry who were able to join in the fun. All along the route of the Coronation procession that June morning were millions of loyal subjects waiting to catch a glimpse of their radiant young Queen. Many of them had been camping out for a week.

(Cut to woman in Old People's Home, surrounded by Coronation mugs, Union Jacks and pictures of Enoch Powell)

Mrs Doris Stothard *(for it is she)*: We all camped out for a week. I had my two little girls with me. But the youngest, Sylvia, got lost in the crowd when she went to find the toilet. But then a kind policeman brought her back, safe and sound. And I said to him...

Voice of Producer: Can you forget the policeman and get back to how it started raining and it didn't dampen your spirits?

Mrs Stothard: Oh yes... it started to rain but it didn't dampen our spirits. And we were all very excited when we heard that they'd climbed Mount Everest. Is that right?

(Jerky black and white footage of two men sitting outside tent on snow-covered mountain. Caption: Edmund Hillary And Sherpa Howard Resting At Base Camp After Their Historic Climb. Posh woman in room with even more dogs)

Lady Pamela: We were all so proud. Of course, Mr Hillary came from New Zealand. But in those days we thought of him as an Englishman. And the same goes for the little Sherpa, even though he was coloured! Ha, ha, ha!

(Cut back to woman in Old People's Home)

Mrs Stothard: As I was saying, it started to rain, but in no way did it dampen our spirits. And there was a great cheer when this big black lady went past in a coach. "That's Winifred Atwell," said my husband. And, d'you know, it was!

Voice of Producer: No, no, no... For heaven's sake, Mrs Stothard, it was the Queen of bloody Tonga. How many times do I have to tell you?

(Black and white footage of Winifred Atwell playing black and white rag)

Narrator: And then came the very best news of all. It was announced that cheese rationing had come to an end!

(Cut to technicolour archive film showing young William Deedes [aged 63] eating cheese sandwich at East End street party and giving cheery thumbs-up sign to camera)

Pathé-style Commentator: A perfect end to a perfect day! Thank you, Ma'am, and God bless you! As the song has it, "It's summertime and the living is cheesy!"

(Music over: Billy Cotton and his orchestra play 'Zadok The Priest')

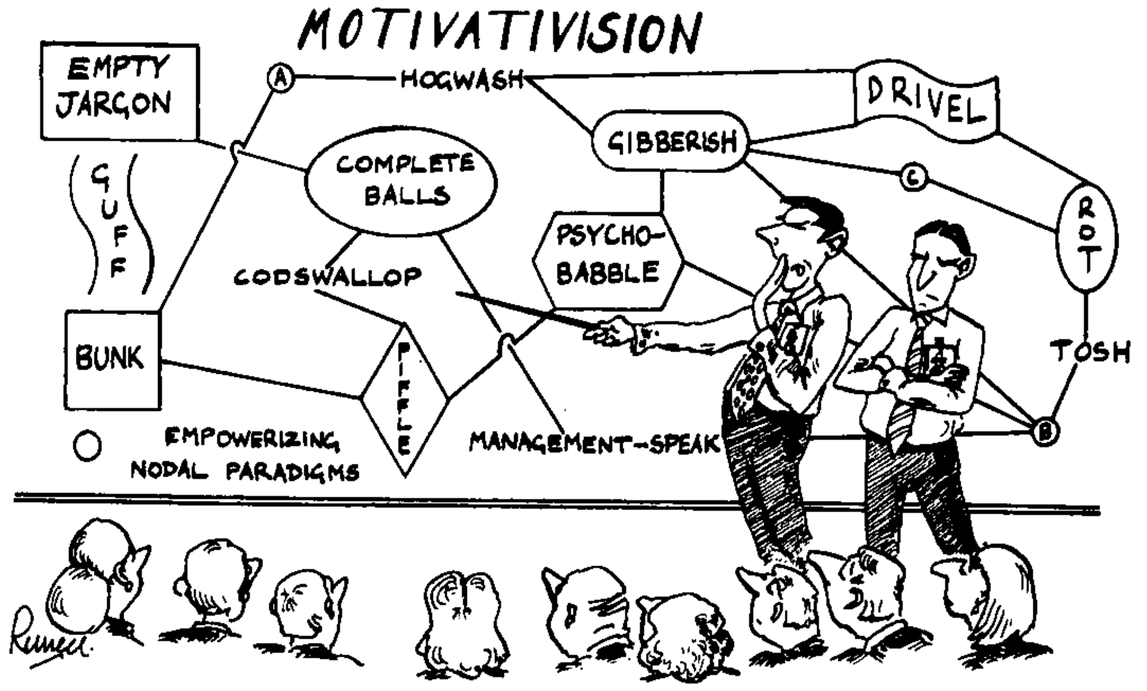
A BBC12 Co-Production With Television Romania and WT-XCJ Ontario

SOLDIERS KILLED IN WAR SHOCK

SEVEN American soldiers have died fighting in a war *(Reuters)*.

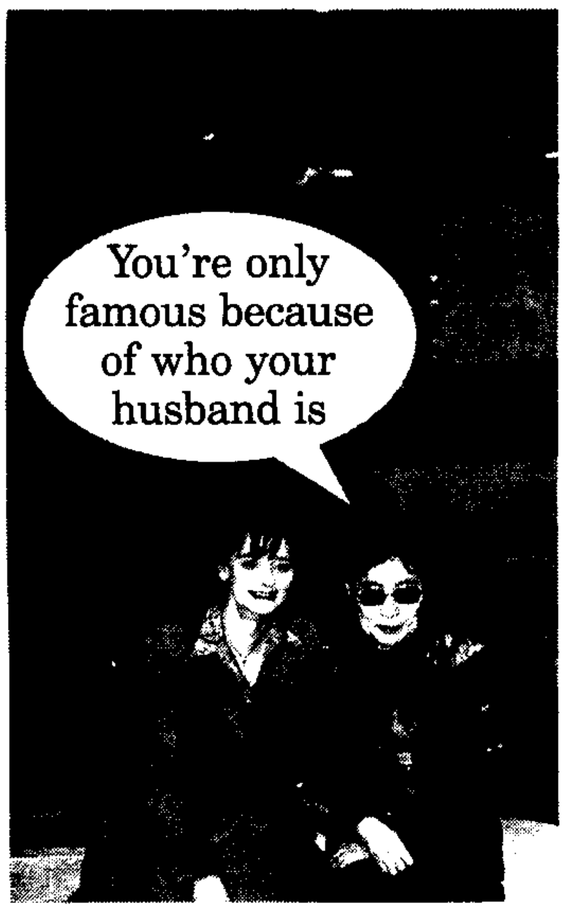
On other pages

- U.S. in shock at deaths **6**
- "This must never happen again" – Bush's pledge **8**
- Is it another Vietnam? asks everybody **10-14**
- What happens when soldiers die – Dr Thomas Stuttaford **16**



"They love it"

CHERIE MEETS YOKO



TV Highlights

One To Watch

THE DYKE A group of volunteers recreate the horrors of working in the BBC. Cut off from the real world, in the notorious hell-hole of White City, they have to endure hours and hours of boredom, interrupted by terrible rations and contradictory orders from on high to dumb down or "cut the crap". As the volunteers admit, "The ratings war is hell".

Eye Verdict: z-z-z-z-z-z

Zimbabwe Nursery Rhymes No. 94

Old Macdonald had a farm
But we beat him to death
And took it over. *(Trad)*

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

BLONDE GIRL SPLITS WITH BOYFRIEND SHOCK

by **Britney Tears**

A BLONDE girl has split up with her boyfriend, it was revealed yesterday.

Late News

Blonde girl denies split with boyfriend.

Even Later News

Blonde girl's boyfriend denies above denial by blonde girl.

ON OTHER PAGES

- 3rd World War Begins In Middle East.

POETRY CORNER

Lines on the retirement of Russell Twisk, Editor of the Reader's Digest

So. Farewell
Then Russell
Twisk.

Twisk.
It is a
Strange name.

A cross
Between whisk
And twist.

E.J. Thrisk (17½)

X of the CENSOREDS

MAN NOT GAY SHOCK

by Our Entire Staff

A MAN last night told an astonished nation, "Yes, I am not gay."

He continued, "It's no big deal. My friends and family have known about this for ages. They're perfectly okay about it and I don't see why it should affect my career."

Experts were, however, sceptical about these claims.

"I think the man is being a bit naïve. The vast majority of men in Britain are gay and coming out as a heterosexual could well turn out to be a mistake for him."

However, the man's supporters cite other instances of men confessing to being "straight" without adverse consequences. Said one, "Elton John once said he was straight. And he even got married. And he still sold millions of records."

He continued, "Being a member of a minority group is no disadvantage these days. We salute him for having the courage to admit that he's glad to be not gay."

"When they divorced Jane got the house, so he's back living with his parents!"

IT'S AN HORRIBILIS PORTRAIT!
I'M SINGIN' IN THE REIGN
THEY SHOULD HAVE HUNG THE ARTIST IN STEAD
IT'S LIKE WATCHING PAINT DIE
SHE SHOULDN'T HAVE STOOD FOR IT
MAYBE NEXT TIME THEY'LL GET DAMIEN HIRST TO PUT HER IN FOR-MALDEHYDE
SHE'S NO OIL PAINTER

Exclusive to all newspapers

September 11th — Six Months On We Must Never Forget

SIX months after September 11th means we must never forget how that event changed so many lives, a time when uncertainty reigned in the days that followed, as everyone in the office wondered just how many extra papers we'd sell on the back of the tragedy.

That is why today we take great pride in publishing a very special sixteen-page full-colour pull-out section full of those horrific images that sold so many papers in the days following in a stark reminder that we must never forget... to buy this newspaper when it prints a sixteen-page pull-out to commemorate a year since the September 11th attacks.

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

NO. 94
LORD HATTERSLEY

As a noted gourmet and *bon viveur*, spoons will obviously play a large part in your life?

Indeed, yes. I think it's very important that Socialists should not turn their backs on the good things of life, which I suppose include spoons. Just because you vote Labour, it doesn't mean to say you can't appreciate the beauty of a spoon.

Did spoons play a significant part in your formative years?

Oh, yes. Remember that I was born and bred in Sheffield, which in those days was the undisputed cutlery centre of the world. Everyone thinks of knives and possibly forks. But for real craftsmanship and reliability you cannot beat a Sheffield spoon. But nowadays, of course, the market is flooded with cheap imitations from the Far East. Mr Blair has a lot to answer for.

You're a Labour man through and through, and yet you were happy to accept a peerage?

What's that got to do with spoons? I'm a busy man. I have a long article to write for the Guardian, and I have a lunch date at 12.30. So, since I've prepared a number of answers to your questions, including some about my dog, could we get back to the subject of this interview please ?

In that case, could I lead you round to your dog?

I'm glad you asked me that one. One of my most treasured possessions is a spoon presented to my mother when she was Lord Mayor of Sheffield, and which I use to this day to serve Pal to my dog Buster.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

No.

NEXT WEEK: Chris Woodhead – *"Me And My Doorbell".*

DIARY

EDWARD WESSEX

Life, whether business or leisure, is all about goals.

You set yourself a goal, be it business or leisure based. Then you put all your available skill and energy into "shooting" that goal. And then – bang! – once you have shot that goal, hopefully it dies with merciful quickness and a minimum of pain.

My life, like "yours", has been all about goals. To my eternal credit, I've managed to "shoot" those goals, bang in the head, one after the other, time after time.

Take my television charity spectacular, for instance. The cynics and carpers (regretfully, they'll always be with us) might have predicted that "It's a Royal Knockout", of which I was privileged to be Executive Event Co-Ordinator and Chief Production Officer, would be – and I quote – "a right Royal wash-out".

Far from it. In the event, it was an outstanding success, earning something over £8.29p for our hand-picked Royal "good causes".

Money for charity – but also tremendous fun for Celebrity Royal VIP participants and "common folk" alike. I will never forget one particularly memorable round. I good-naturedly dressed up as a carrot – only to find myself inserted in no uncertain manner up the backside of the aubergine, played by top singer Sir Cliff Richard!!!

"Crikey!" I quipped, in a totally off-the-cuff ad-lib, amidst literally hoots of laughter, "I wasn't expecting that!!"

Classic!

All in a day's work! Some of us will never forget that day and its fantastic success. It was quite literally "unforgettable". So much for the cynics!

Work hard – play hard. That's always been my goal. The opportunity to set up and run my own company has got to be the biggest challenge I have ever faced – yet it has turned out to be enormous fun, immensely rewarding – profits of £30,000 last year, after just 9 years – and literally full of surprises!

Our list of achievements is indeed remarkable:

● **Edward on Real Tennis**: A three-hour special on how exactly to play Real Tennis – presented by yours truly! Sold as a three and a half minute insert to Anglia TV's prestigious "About Anglia" early evening slot!

● **Royalty from A-Z:** A right royal celebration of that hardworking institution affectionately known as The Royal Family – by the one young man who knows it best! Hugely successful in terms of media interest, but for the moment "on hold" while we iron out the odd "blip" with episode three, "C is for Casual Sex".

● **Edward on Margaret:** Tastefully shot tragic deathbed scenes of the unfulfilled Princess, cross-questioned by top presenter Edward Wessex (pre-sold stateside to CBS's Box Office Gold).

Outstanding achievements – yet I always knew in the back of my mind that one day things would have to change.

It is quite obvious that in this year, the Golden Jubilee, we are required more than ever to support the Queen. It is my duty as perhaps the most widely-respected younger Royal to help my family shoulder some of the increasing responsibilities and workload into the future. If my wife, HRH The Countess of Wessex, and I can lend that much needed "dash of glamour" and "touch of class" to this very special Royal year, then it is more than ever appropriate that we should put our undoubted achievements on the proverbial back-burner.

My superb lady wife, Sophie Wessex, will henceforward be placing her public relations skills at the service of Her Majesty. In union with my own widely-acclaimed expertise as the "maestro of the small screen", we should be literally quite a combination!

Sophie says it's all about increasing brand awareness of the Royal product across a broad-based social spectrum without compromising the unique selling point of RD, or Royal Decorum. With this "goal" in mind, we have jointly facilitated a five-point plan to guarantee the ongoing success of the Golden Jubilee, or "Project GJ":

● HM the Q to adopt more up-to-the-minute, informal and "ironic" approach when touring UK – Anne Robinson "wink". TBC.

● HM the Q to replace outdated "wave" with consumer-friendly "thumbs-up" gesture. TBC.

● HM the Q to update costume to smart-casual, poss. wearing tongue-in-cheek "I LUV BRITNEY" T-Shirt at selected seaside venues in July, August. TBC

● Following popular success of "It's a Royal Knockout", HM the Q to appear on Radio One Roadshow dressed as Brussel Sprout, accompanied by HRH D of E, poss. as Jerusalem Artichoke. Pair of them to arm-wrestle on a plank above a "gunge-tank" – Top TV mega-star Noel Edmonds has already agreed to "compere" the event in his own inimitable fashion!!! TBC

● HM the Q to develop suitable "catch-phrase", easily recognisable by target audience. *Shortlist update:* "Oooh, Betty!!" "Shut that door!" "Awight?" "Nice to see you, to see you – NICE!"

In this, the year of our Golden Jubilee, Sophie Wessex and I are determined not to let down our many millions of admirers, so we will be touring this "great" nation of ours with a varied yet accessible selection of complimentary gifts and introductory "promo" offers.

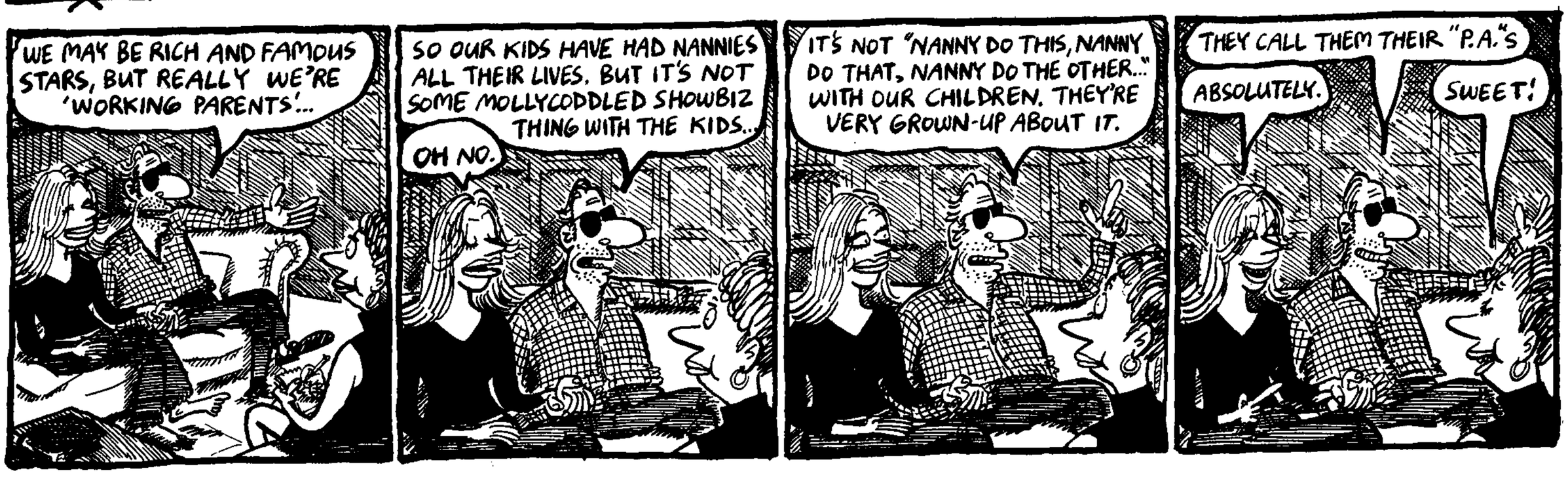
Earlier this week, we toured our own "home town" of Bagshot, and in doing so gave a lot of people a lot of pleasure – and that, in a Royal nutshell, is the business we're in. Furthermore, Sophie has agreed to take on many of the duties of the late Princess Margaret. She plans to stay in bed longer each morning, chain-smoke, wear dark glasses and pour herself a "livener" on the dot of 11.30am.

And what of my own good self? I'll be taking over full personal responsibility for masterminding HM the Q's "Royal Progress" around the country, with full TV and video rights in my own capable hands. Upturning perception in a niche market – that's the name of the game.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


WE MAY BE RICH AND FAMOUS STARS, BUT REALLY WE'RE 'WORKING PARENTS'...
SO OUR KIDS HAVE HAD NANNIES ALL THEIR LIVES. BUT IT'S NOT SOME MOLLYCODDLED SHOWBIZ THING WITH THE KIDS..
OH NO.
IT'S NOT "NANNY DO THIS, NANNY DO THAT, NANNY DO THE OTHER..." WITH OUR CHILDREN. THEY'RE VERY GROWN-UP ABOUT IT.
THEY CALL THEM THEIR "P.A."S
ABSOLUTELY.
SWEET!

Literary Review

Harris twee

Coastliners
Joanne Harris
(Doubleday, £12.99)

ENGLISH writers have found England such a dull little literary province in the last 20 years that they keep trying, in their minds and plots at least, to seek asylum somewhere else. The longest immigration line — headed by Mart and Ian — winds back from the American embassy. Now, though, there's quite a huddle flapping their passports hopefully at Paris.

Monsieur Barnes is so many kilometres ahead in that novelists' Tour De France you wonder why anyone else bothers to saddle up. But there's Sebastian Faulks straining up the hill towards Stage One and, pedalling frantically on her pushbike along those opening flats, look out for Joanne Harris.

Harris is battling Faulks to be the Anglo-French leader in the genre of Hen Lit, superior romances for the mothers of the girls who buy the chick lit books. A Yorkshire teacher who published two forgotten horror stories in the late 1980s, she's parlayed a bilingual background and a childhood in France into bestsellerdom with novels which permit the middle-classes to hop on the Eurostar mentally when they're unable to do so physically.

But it's wrong to see Harris as merely a Mademoiselle Faulks of middlebrow books. Her success comes from developing a new distinctive train of the Anglo-French novel. Harris's speciality is kitchen-fiction. *Chocolat* — sex and confectionery in a sweet little French village — was followed by *Blackberry Wine* and *Five Quarters Of The Orange*. Her recipe for bestsellerdom was to include a recipe.

Starving apprentice novelists out there might like to reflect that the new super-selling genres of recent years have often come from creating a fictional version of a factual genre. The novels of Nick Hornby and Helen Fielding are essentially dramatised versions of those relationship-doctor books with titles like *Blokes Are From Sodbury, Women Are From Barking*. Harris's novels read like a fictionalisation of Peter Mayle's Provence books and Jamie and Nigella's cookbooks. Anyone who can create DIY Lit or Car Maintenance Fiction probably has it made.

But the biggest division in literature is between publishers and readers – who'd ideally like every book to be the same as the last one — and writers, who dream of each new story being different. After *Chocolat* was filmed and Denched by Hollywood, Harris's accountants and fan base would have settled for a decade of food-related romances. Having done blackberries and oranges with books two and three, the jacket-design department was probably downloading images of strawberries, lemons and kumquats.

Harris, though, showing a stroppiness which wins more admiration than her prose style, has suddenly put her plots and titles on hunger-strike. *Coastliners* has nothing to get the reader salivating except the odd tin of mackerel. A bit *Shipping Newsy*, it's a Breton novel about the long feud between two island villages: La Houssiniere and Les Salants. The former community is rich, the latter poor. A Salannais woman, returning home after 10 years away, tries to put one over the Houssins, helped by a sexy drifter. There's a secret hidden in the parish register and the climax begins with the church bells ringing unexpectedly.

Strong woman attracting local superstition and suspicion; mysterious wastrel; ancient ville with creepy clerics. It's *Chocolat* again but without the sweet-shop metaphor which lent that book some distinction. The dialogue is stilted English with the occasional italic word thrown in to remind us they're frogs. Hence someone will suddenly say "So she has, ma soeur", a line which would be undistinguished in either English or French but is hugely annoying as a combination. The narrative voice has an irritating way with short, verbless, supplementary sentences: "Until now"; "Not that it matters". Faced with this drab Franglais fiction, what can an English reader say except: oh la la!

Hip of the pen

Best of British
Volume Three

WELL, here we are, barely a whisker into 2002 and already *Granta* is earnestly soliciting candidates for next year's "Best of British Young Novelists" promotion. Soliciting money from their publishers, too, because this kind of thing costs and we would be deluding ourselves to imagine that dignified cultural services of this sort are ever fixed up out of the kindness of the sponsors' hearts.

Literary-minded folk of a certain age will probably recall the original "Best of British" list from 1983. Dreamed up by *Granta*'s founding editor, the bearded and bristling Bill Buford, with the ready assistance of the Book Marketing Council, it was a terrific success – as it could hardly fail to be, given the lustre of those involved. Salman, Mart, Swifty, Ish, Boyd, Mo – however shopworn the early 80s novel may look in retrospect, these were boom times for fiction, and Bill and the booktrade cleaned up.

If a literary idea works the first time, no one involved can ever resist having another go, however unpromising the circumstances. And so, come 1992, with the bull market in British fiction indisputably at an end, A.S. Byatt and Salman Rushdie were given each other's fax numbers and told to come up with the necessary names. It is a measure of the difficulties they faced that, 10 years further on, even those of us who were there at the time will struggle to recall more than a handful of the successful names. Huge favours, inevitably, were done to the deserving, even if it meant bending the rules: Will Self, for example, figured on the list despite having not yet produced a novel.

Worse still from the point of view of those involved in this '93 reprise, the kiss of death usually attended the reputations of those involved. Jeanette Winterson's career subsequently went into precipitous decline. Ish followed his Booker-winning *The Remains of the Day* with the near-unreadable *The Unconsoled*. Adam Lively has never written another novel, while Louis de Bernieres, having hit the jackpot with *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* in 1994, set off on what is now an eight-year stint of writer's block.

The message to the tyro writer is clear: "Best of British" promotions are to be avoided. But who can we expect to see beaming (or sulking) from the colour supplements in a year's time? Zadie Smith, obviously, because if she's not there the thing instantly loses half its publicity value. The same, to a slightly lesser extent, goes for Philip Hensher, who, at 38, will just slip under the age barrier. Toby Litt and Niall Griffiths, among other fashionable young hipsters, can be expected to put in an appearance.

In an effort to attract the attention of the non-literary audience and secure features in the *Daily Mail*, there may even be a chick-fic babe or two. As for the handful of promising young newcomers who deserve to be there on merit – Sarah May, Ben Richards and Joel Lane spring to mind – well, it would be nice to see them. But remember, like practically every other attempt to push books down the throat of a mostly indifferent public, this is a *marketing* exercise. The pen may dazzle, but alas the face has to fit.

Books & Bookmen

■ PETER "Eeyore" Straus of Picador, publisher of Booker-winner Graham Swift, has put in a handsome bid for the author's new manuscript, *The Light of Day* — only to find that Swift's agent Caradoc King is not only offering it to other publishers (which is common enough) but also inviting them to buy his eight previous novels, all currently in print from Picador.

"For a serious imprint like Picador, the backlist is its raison d'etre," Robert McCrum noted in the *Observer* last Sunday. "It was almost unthinkable for an author's previously published books to be traded in defiance of existing contractual arrangements."

What McCrum failed to notice was an even more "unthinkable" demand in Caradoc King's letter to prospective bidders. Admitting that "this is not a traditional publishing auction", the agent says he'll be particularly interested in "any innovative proposals you may have to make your offer particularly competitive, such as... a payment for the back list not set against royalties." Or, in plain English, a bung. No publisher to whom the *Eye* has spoken can remember a case of an agent requiring a straight cash payment not set against royalties.

The tactic may yet backfire, not least because several publishers feel that Eeyore has been shabbily treated by King. At least two — Faber and Jonathan Cape — have already refused on principle to

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
THIS IS JUST WHAT YOU NEED FOR THE ONSET OF SPRING
ALAN TITCHMARSH HOW TO BE A GARDENER
Alan TITCHMARSH HOW TO BE A GARDENER
I CAN'T MOW THE LAWN — I'VE A BOOK TO READ!

cooperate with his "innovative" salesmanship.

■ THE *Publishing News*-organised British Book Awards, aka the Nibbies, have been and gone, and in contrast to previous years when there were dark mutterings about a supposed correlation between the winners and their generosity to *PN*'s ad department, all was transparent and on the level this time.

The only sour note came from Joan Collins, who was presenting one of the awards but used the platform to plug *Star Quality*, her new novel for Robson Books. She also harpied on about bad experiences with her previous publishers, "some of whom are here tonight", and rejoiced that she now has "the most wonderful hands-on editor" in the form of Jeremy Robson.

Her *Dynasty*-style bitchery referred to her long spat with Random House, which began in 1991 after the publisher claimed one of her manuscripts was unprintable and asked for its $1.3m advance back. It took until 1996 for a US court to rule that, whatever the merits of her prose, Collins had kept her side of the contract and could keep the dosh.

■ ACCORDING to the *Bookseller*, "John Blake has split away from his partner and brother David Blake to create a new company of which he is sole owner". While this report is true enough, Flakey Blakey seems to be using it to disguise a far more interesting story – ie the reason he and his brother are parting company.

The *Bookseller* report describes David Blake's departure as if it were recent, but in fact he left just under three years ago. A look at Blake Publishing's financial report for the year to 31 December 1999 perhaps offers an explanation for his decision to jump, listing debts of £266,990 "which are believed by the director [that is, Flakey Blakey] to be with either Mr David Blake or his related parties".

In addition the auditor notes that an earlier doubtful debt provision of £348,560 had been reversed "as the Director is of the opinion that the underlying debts are in substance the responsibility of Mr D Blake". So, David Blake's departure really resulted from him and "his related parties" somehow costing the family firm a figure north of £600,000. In the meantime, a Mr David Peter Blake of St John's Wood has been disqualified by Companies House from holding any form of directorship until February 2007. Obviously a coincidence.

■ *EYE* readers have found even more mistakes in the *Oxford Companion To Twentieth Century Politics*, edited by John Ramsden (see *Eye 1049*).

The Labour politician and journalist Tom Driberg's name is given in full as "John Edward Neil Driberg", although he was christened Thomas. The *Companion* also records that the former Liberal MP for North Dorset, Frank Byers, was: "The father of Stephen Byers, member of Tony Blair's cabinet."

Curiously, in *Who's Who?* Stephen Byers is described as the son of the late Robert Byers.

PUFFWATCH

IS THERE *anything* Nicholas Coleridge, managing director of Condé Nast, won't do to promote his new novel *Godchildren*?

The book has already been praised in the pages of CN's *Vogue* and *GQ* (see *Eye* 1048) and had its launch-party photographed for the website of CN's *Glamour* magazine (see last *Eye*). Now it has the accolade of a review in CN's *Vanity Fair*, while also being hailed as *the* book to take on holiday by *Condé Nast Traveller*. What next? *The* perfect wedding present, as recommended by Condé Nast's *Brides & Setting Up Home*?

Puffing Coleridge now seems to be a full-time job for his loyal employees. Not content with covering the launch-party for *Godchildren*, the *Glamour* website is determined to smuggle him in everywhere else as well. In a section headed "PARTY PEOPLE: See how Britain's biggest stars party in style", celebs such as Kate Moss, Kate Winslet, Madonna et al are conspicuous by their absence. Instead we are treated to photos from *Glamour*'s own launch, featuring "Georgia Coleridge, wife of Nicholas Coleridge", resplendent in Kenzo jacket and Rachel Roberts skirt, plus a charming study of "Nicholas Coleridge, managing director of Condé Nast" with a PR woman from Ralph Lauren.

Turning to the pictures of Toby Young's book-launch, we find "Georgia Coleridge, wife of Condé Nast managing director Nicholas Coleridge". Even in the photos from London Fashion Week there's no escape: "Nicholas and Georgia Coleridge, posing through faceholes in the latest Jil Sander poster."

For hacks, meanwhile, *Telegraph* book reviewer Christopher Hart hit the nail on the head in the opening paragraph of his review of *Godchildren*. "Tricky thing, reviewing the latest book by the single most important man in British magazine publishing," writes Hart. "Slate it, and you forever forfeit your dream of becoming Assistant Editor (Health and Beauty) at Vogue. Praise it, and you look like a despicable crawler."

Hart spoilt his magnificent insight by being a despicable crawler and describing Coleridge's oeuvre as "a fast, funny, tinglingly pleasurable electric-shock of a novel".

'Bookworm'

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, PT 94

Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper

Nicholson Baker *(Vintage, £7.99)*

. . . BUT it is to the near-ineffably demonic figure of Hiram J. Mooseburger III, part-time assistant deputy administrator at the state penitentiary library of Utah, that the plundering of these bibliophilic riches and – their luminous corollary – the decline of western civilisation, can be so purposefully pinned. Mooseburger produced a menacingly prescient gist of his intentions in an article entitled "Cost-Cycle Analyses for the Creation, Storage and Dissemination of a Digitized Book Collection" written for the *Montana Library Journal*. "Gee whizz, pardners," he wrote, with what seems altogether lurid candour, "wouldn't it be just great if we put our books on microfilm?"

Let us think, grandly and awfully, for a second about what Mooseburger has just said, think about the three hundred million discrete acts of inclusive yet impulsive judgment needed to build the paper empire over which he and his associates so imperially presided and the agglomerate boon passed on to those who follow them. Sauntering through the gnarled, papery junglitude of some down-town book-mart not long after reading this ill-considered effusion, in restive search of the June 20 1873 morning edition of the *Saskatchewan Intelligencer*, I discovered the full, magnitudinous consequences of the Mooseburger blueprint. Why, here in all their stately, burnished glory were copies of Brinsley C. Spokane's 1894 classic *Wanderings among the Elk Population of Wyoming*, Sheridan Brushwood's all-too little known *Prairie Poems* (1855), that highly egregious Southern divine Solomon Brimstone's exhortatory *God or Bust* (1883), a near-complete run of . . . (*continues interminably.*)

FREEMAN-ATTWOOD – On February 12th to Emmy, wife of Julian Freeman-Attwood, a daughter Lily Tibet, a sister for Ivy Antarctica.

***Daily Telegraph* births column**

On Farting
Bodily Wind in the Middle Ages

Valerie Allen, Professor, Department of English, John Jay College of Criminal Justice and **John Thompson**, Professor in the Department of Modern Languages and Literature, California Polytechnic State University

The study of the fart in medieval culture participates in the widespread and productive contemporary study of the body, its practices and its hermeneutics. As a consequence of the cultural materialist interest in the quotidian, recent criticism has moved away from an abstracted conception of selfhood toward an appreciation of how the concrete daily regimens of bodily habits generally taken for granted, shape the horizon of our cultural and individual consciousness. The fart, in its parodying of language and its logic of affinity, leads us ultimately to the problem of hermeneutics, of the art of interpretation itself (*continues*)

Palgrave publishers catalogue

Pseuds Corner

La Linea ('The Line'), the South Bank's alternative Latin music festival, is back again, posing ever more urgent questions: how are the traditional and popular musics of Cuba, Mexico, Columbia and Argentina adapting in the face of the globalisation of electronic dance music?

PHILIP SWEENEY
South Bank

A V-shaped recovery seems unlikely... and W-shaped and L-shaped recoveries seem unlikely too... What seems likely is a bath-shaped or saucer-shaped recovery where the upturn is gradual.

WPP group spokesman,
quoted in *Media Week*

Last weekend, I did research in my office at home, getting my head around the problems with the NHS – about five years' work in itself.

NICKY CAMPBELL
Guardian

Pseuds Corporate

Our local strategy enables us to listen to all the voices around the world asking for beverages that span the entire spectrum of tastes and occasions. What people want in a beverage is a reflection of who they are, where they live, how they work and play, and how they relax and recharge. Whether you're a student in the United States enjoying a refreshing Coca-Cola, a woman in Italy taking a tea break, a child in Peru asking for a juice drink, or a couple in Korea buying bottled water after a run together, we're there for you.

From the Coca-Cola website

CONTRIBUTORS: Wendy Chetwin, John Charmley, Dange Ginsb, Alastair Young, Chris Dalton, Michael Solan .

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

DONNYGATE

BUNGS AND LOVERS

FIVE GUILTY verdicts were handed down as the first Donnygate corruption trial ended in Nottingham last week (*Eyes passim*). Developer Alan Hughes got five years in prison for corrupting former Labour planning chairman Peter Birks with a bribe of a £160,000 farmhouse. Birks got four years inside for delivering planning permission on a greenfield site known as Poppyfields, the £2.25m profit from which helped Hughes to avoid bankruptcy.

Former deputy leader and mayor Ray Stockhill was found guilty of accepting financial and other gifts to assist in a number of Hughes' planning applications and got a two-year suspended jail sentence. Birks's partner, Stephanie Higginson, a former JP, was found guilty of aiding and abetting corruption – the farm was registered in her name. She got 160 hours' community service. Hughes's "financial assistant", Gordon Armitage, was found guilty on the same charges and got a year inside.

In court, Hughes's defence had been that he scarcely knew Birks, but was having an affair with his partner, Higginson, and had given her the farm as a romantic gesture. Higginson sobbed as she confirmed her lover's successful attempt to cuckold the former planning chairman.

Not revealed at the trial was Hughes's attempt to extend his web of corruption to Leeds, by treating a Tory councillor from that city to a sophisticated evening at a Doncaster massage parlour [Lord Gnome will pay the customary fiver for the name].

Raymond Stockhill was not far behind his long-time drinking buddy in the Ugandan department, using money given him by Hughes to finance a relationship with Vicky Laurens, a drug addicted prostitute. Stockhill posed as her "uncle" and provided a reference for a flat plus a £200 bond and £200 for the first months' rent. Sex of the grubbier kind has always played a part in Donnygate.

Strategic development officer Keith Miller (*Eyes passim*), who accompanied councillors on many of their junkets, found time to whisk a mistress off to Genoa on one occasion, courtesy of the council taxpayer. In an earlier trial former education chairman Chas Harrison pleaded guilty to stopping over at conferences because he was engaged in enthusiastic Ugandan discussions with another councillor.

Why did Doncaster stay so rotten so long? Back in January 1998, Tony Blair, left alone between trains on Doncaster station, while Alastair Campbell was off having a crap – at least it makes a change from talking it – was persuaded to pose with a copy of the local paper, praising the "new regime" of Malcolm Glover and Michael Farrington. Both of whom were almost immediately arrested, charged and found guilty of fiddling.

How could St Tony have been so naïve? Three years earlier, while leader of the opposition, he had received a dossier from former Labour councillor, the playwright Ron Rose. It named names, explained Doncaster's culture of corruption and how the council was run by a cabal known as the Mining Community Group. But Blair did nothing to ensure that the corruption was rooted out. Then, after Labour came to power, he made his "one strike and you're out" speech about how bad apples would no longer be tolerated in local government. In Yorkshire, Lancashire and the north-east, corruption was rampant; and the actual response of regional officials was to cover up at all costs and vilify and expel whistle-blowers – usually loyal, honest Labour party members.

Operation Danum has been the biggest police investigation into local government ever – bigger even than the Poulson inquiry of the early 1970s which itself followed a *Private Eye* story which appeared on 24 April 1970. The parallels between Donny and Poulson are intriguing: both reveal the same culture of corruption in northern Labour councils; in some cases the same companies are involved – even the same individuals.

DONCASTER Star

Relax

Blair backs the new regime

Prime Minister praises Doncaster Council

Star AT LAST! Rioters are said

Error of judgement: Tony Blair

For instance, one subsidiary of Keepmoat, the company which lavished "hospitality" on bent Doncaster councillors in the 1990s, is Frank Haslam Milan, which in the 1970s was a contractor for Poulson and T Dan Smith's supposedly revolutionary "Open System Building" pre-fab construction company. Today Frank Haslam Milan is deeply involved in social housing "partnerships" with councils across the north.

One senior former Mexborough councillor, Tommy Roebuck, who did time for Poulson offences, was elected to Doncaster council when he came out of prison, was arrested again in the course of the Donnygate investigation and escaped only by pleading the "Saunders defence". In fact throughout the inquiry there was much recourse by arrested councillors to the sick note, the wheelchair, the neck brace, crutch and zimmer frame.

The depressing thing is that, as in the former scandal, the Labour party appears to have learned nothing from its utter humiliation in Doncaster over the past five years. It has been consistent only in backing each and every bent "new" regime to the hilt, and smearing critics. When former Labour leader Malcolm Glover was arrested, Doncaster North MP Kevin Hughes attacked the police operation on local radio, saying: "They'll be arresting people for taking a cup of coffee next." Glover went on to be found guilty after facing 19 charges of fraud.

FOOTNOTES

THE SLICKER OF WAKEFIELD

J. L. POULSON

How the *Eye* broke the Poulson scandal 32 years ago (April 1970)

Meanwhile regional Labour party press officer Mark Covell maintained a steady stream of "negative briefing" against anybody who stepped out of line. Predictably he now finds himself elevated to the Downing Street press office.

Now the latest "New Regime" – the fifth – in the person of teenage deputy leader Aiden Rave, has called for "a line to be drawn" under Donnygate. Some hope: many more lines will have to be drawn before "Donnygate" is finally over.

HUNT BALLS

THE Socialist Medical Association (SMA) was formed in the 1930s to campaign in the Labour party for a national health service in which health care was divorced from commercial profit. The dedicated work of the pioneers of the SMA was at least partly responsible for the setting up of the NHS in 1948.

Lord Hunt of PFI

In 1979 the SMA changed its name to the Socialist Health Association (SHA). The SHA still campaigns for the principles of the NHS and is strongly opposed to the current fashion for building hospitals and providing health care by means of "partnerships" with the private sector, such as the private finance initiative (PFI).

A statement issued last September by the central council of the SHA noted "serious concerns in the Labour movement about the dependency of the NHS on private finance". It went on: "The trend over the last 25 years has been to reduce the availability of state funding and encourage private investment, a truly Thatcherite policy that the Labour government should surely have abandoned by now." It concluded: "PFI contracts are not a good deal for the NHS because they end up with more profit than is justified by the risk they carry."

The SHA policy applies all over the country – with the exception, apparently, of its second city, Birmingham. In South Birmingham plans are far advanced to build, under PFI, a huge new £300m hospital to replace the existing Selly Oak and Queen Elizabeth hospitals. The plans have not been well received by people in the area, but are strongly supported by the local branch of the Socialist Health Association.

The plans were first put forward soon after the Labour government was elected in 1997. Like most PFI hospital plans, they appeared to imply fewer beds, less health care and more public money. The organisation responsible for assessing and publicising public reactions on health matters was the South Birmingham community health council (CHC).

The CHCs, which were set up in 1974, are entirely independent of the local health bureaucracy. In November 1997, the South Birmingham CHC circulated a leaflet throughout the area, setting out the PFI proposals and an alternative strategy involving the refurbishment of the two existing hospitals and asking people (at their own expense) to reply: 3,373 people did so. Of these 3,159 supported the CHC's "alternative option". Only 178 supported the PFI proposal.

The CHC published these figures. The Birmingham health authority, by contrast, issued three complicated consultation documents on a health strategy and the new hospital, none of which discussed PFI or its implications. So dense and complicated were the proposals that very few people responded: there were 628 replies, only 40 percent of which came from the general public. The health authority's initiative did not impress the community health council. It continued to question the PFI plans.

The authority's response was to try to bully the CHC into submission. On 2 March 1998, CHC chair Ursula Pearce and her vice-chairman were invited to West Midlands NHS regional office, where they were told that the CHC should operate within the framework of government policy and support PFI. They resisted this approach and were supported by their national organisation and by their lawyers, both of whom emphasised that the whole point of CHCs was to act independently of

government and the national health bureaucracy.

As part of its "consultation", the health authority then set up a 13-member advisory panel, chaired by Philip Hunt, then chief executive of the NHS Confederation, a body representing NHS trusts and health authorities. The previous year (1997) Hunt had been ennobled by "new" Labour, and he was a strong supporter of its PFI hospitals policy. Among the members of the panel were Jeff Chandra and Mark Santer, Bishop of Birmingham. No one was surprised when the panel endorsed the PFI proposal.

Nor were people overwhelmingly impressed by another expensive "consultation" by the health authority, which inspired 48 replies. Several members of the panel were subsequently promoted. Lord Hunt became parliamentary under secretary at the health department. Jeff Chandra became chief executive of the Good Hope hospital in North Birmingham, and Bishop Santer became vice chairman of the University Hospital Birmingham Trust.

In September 1998 two new members, both Labour party activists, joined the CHC. They were Brian Seymour-Smith, a public relations consultant working under contract for Birmingham health authority, and engineering union member Malcolm Baker. Both were appointed to the CHC by the secretary of state. Both immediately and vociferously supported the PFI hospital. They were joined in 1999 by Khalid Mahmood, another Labour activist and PFI supporter who was appointed through the Socialist Health Association.

Nevertheless in July 1999, the CHC resolved – by 14 votes to six – to oppose the new PFI hospital. Brian Seymour-Smith vehemently and publicly opposed the decision. Malcolm Baker was driven by Claire Austin, head of communications at the University Hospital Trust, round the homes of those who had not attended the meeting and attempted (unsuccessfully) to persuade them to register their support for the PFI hospital. Baker and Seymour-Smith have since left the CHC. Khalid Mahmood is now Labour MP for Birmingham Perry Barr.

In 2000 and 2001, Ursula Pearce, chair of the CHC, attended the Birmingham branch of the Socialist Health Association. She was astonished on both occasions by the number of people there who had been appointed to the NHS bureaucracy by the secretary of state and who strongly supported the PFI hospital. They included John Charlton and Mark Britnell, chair and chief executive of the University Hospital Trust which proposes to build the new hospital; Alan Wenban-Smith, former chair of the Birmingham health authority; Jean Trainer and Sue Turner, chair and chief executive of the Mental Health Trust; Paul Castle, chair of the Heartlands and Solihull Hospital Trust; Brian Seymour-Smith, the loquacious PR man; Clive Wilkinson, who chaired the regional health authority and Khalid Mahmood. Other SHA members who sat on the committee or sent apologies were Bryan Stoten, who chaired Birmingham health authority during the PFI consultations; and Lord Hunt.

John Charlton, chairman

Mark Britnell, chief executive

Ursula Pearce is no longer a member of the CHC, which continues to express doubts about the new hospital, but she never ceases to wonder how the PFI plans, so unpopular with the public, have been so enthusiastically adopted by so many important people connected to a Labour party organisation whose central purpose was, and is, to oppose health care provision for profit.

FUN AND BRAIN GAMES

A LARGE package of documents which dropped through the *Eye*'s letter box last week sheds new light on Brain Games Network plc (BGN), the company fronted by former Tory chairman Sir Jeremy Hanley and run by Ray "The Penguin" Keene (right), the Arthur Daley of the chess world, with Mayfair entrepreneur Alan Lubin.

Also included in the envelope is some intriguing correspondence from Edwin Coe, who were not only BGN's solicitors but also acted as its bankers during the spring and summer of 2000 until the company opened a bank account with Barclays. Taken together, the BGN papers provide something of a masterclass on how to do business the Penguin way.

Lesson one is on how to acquire 88 percent of a multi-million pound plc for a song. Three private limited companies are bought off the shelf. Also buy an off-the-shelf plc, in this case one with 25 million shares of 1p each available for issue. But instead of paying 1p per share for the 22 million shares taken by Keene, Giloberg Finance Ltd (Lubin's Swiss company) and their assignees, the Penguin and his mate hand over their three private companies — whose combined value is a mere £2,300. Instead of receiving £220,000 in cash, BGN is now the unproud owner of three firms that have never traded and are worth about a hundredth of that sum.

But wait, you may say, hadn't one of those three companies, Havendisc Ltd, first acquired the English Chess Association, a "valuable asset"? That is what Keene and Lubin would have everyone believe, and this forms the subject of lesson two – providing an almost worthless company with the appearance of value.

First, ownership of Havendisc Ltd was made to look as though it had been transferred to Keene and Giloberg on 20 March 2000 from its owners at incorporation, LLC Nominees Ltd and Master Nominees Ltd. Sadly for our tutors they omitted to do this, as was discovered months later by their lawyer Russel Shear, of Edwin Coe. On 2 October he wrote to BGN's accountant pointing out that no paperwork existed in his files to indicate that the shares in Havendisc Ltd were actually issued. In short, Keene and Giloberg did not own Havendisc at the time they sold it to BGN. The accountant duly signed two stock-transfer forms, backdated to 20 March.

The second stage was to endow Havendisc with some appearance of having value. Keene and Lubin attempted this by signing a "Business Sale Agreement", also dated 20 March 2000, in which Keene and Giloberg "sold" to Havendisc a "business" called The English Chess Association, in return for shares in Havendisc worth £300. As we have already pointed out (*Eye* 1045), the ECA was not a genuine association and had no members.

The next lesson is straightforward. As soon as you have created the pretence that your company has some value, sell it forthwith. Thus Lubin, signing on behalf of both BGN and Giloberg, executed yet another agreement with Keene, also dated 20 March (what a busy day that was), "for the sale and purchase of the share capital of Havendisc Ltd" in return for 4 million shares in BGN.

Now you see how easy it is. By these three paper transactions the 300 shares in Havendisc, worth £300 in total, were traded for £40,000 worth of shares in BGN, thereby completing the acquisition by Keene, Lubin and their assignees of £220,000 worth of BGN shares, representing 88 percent of its total stock, and all this for an outlay of just £2,300. Meanwhile, in the first week of March, the investors put up £3m for the remaining 12 percent, giving the shareholding of Keene, Lubin et al a paper value of £22m.

Many business manuals advise you to "cut out the middleman". The lesson of BGN, however, is that it's profitable to *add* a middleman who happens to, er, yourself. "The opportunity to purchase the web site 'Internetchess.com' was considered," BGN's board minutes for 3 May 2000 note. "It was reported that this site was to be the basis for BGN's WCC coverage and the purchase price of £290,000 plus the issue of 31,250 new shares was approved." (In fact the site was not used for BGN's coverage of the World Chess Championship, nor for anything much else.) Thus a cash payment of £290,000 was made, but to whom? Not, as you might assume, to the owners of the website, Chess & Bridge Ltd; but to Lubin's company Giloberg. On 10 May, Russel Shear of Edwin Coe received a phone call from Lubin asking for £290,000 of BGN's money to be transferred to Giloberg's account in Switzerland. (Shear immediately complied with this request even though, as his own attendance note admits, he did not have any paperwork from BGN at that time to justify the payment.) It transpired that on 5 May – two days *after* the board decision – Lubin had signed an agreement with Chess & Bridge to purchase the website for $100,000. He then collected a massive profit by selling it on to BGN, of which he was a director.

In case the reader finds all these lessons bewildering, the BGN papers offer a much simpler way of taking money out of a company. On 8 March 2000 Russel Shear of Edwin Coe was instructed by Lubin to pay Raymond Keene £50,000. Shear obliged and the money was treated in BGN's accounts as fees owed to Keene, even though there had been no mention of such a fee in BGN's Private Placement Memorandum, the document used to raise money from investors, issued on 2 March. Two days later Lubin submitted an invoice from Giloberg for £145,000 worth of "corporate advice… etc." Edwin Coe paid up immediately. Then, on 4 April, Lubin wanted even more money and so another £25,000 was sent to Giloberg in Switzerland.

Thus far £170,000 had been sent to Giloberg. Add the £230,000 overpayment for the website and the total as of mid-May was £400,000 — plus, of course, the BGN shares. But apparently even that was not enough to be getting on with. On 24 May Lubin received a fax from an R.A. MacLean of 10 rue Blavignac, Geneva, in connection with a company called Cerro Services S.A. and asking Lubin to send 250,000 Swiss Francs to the Guernsey bank account of yet another company, Rhone Trustees Ltd. Lubin kindly obliged by instructing Edwin Coe to send £100,000 of BGN's money. But BGN had no business dealings with either Cerro Services or Rhone Trustees; the fax from MacLean was not an invoice to BGN; nor did the fax mention BGN in any way. So what was the £100,000 for and why did Lubin use BGN's money to satisfy MacLean's request?

By late May Lubin's cash total from BGN had grown to £500,000, but even half a million quid does not go far when you have a flat in Mayfair and a home and yacht on the Med to maintain. So on 9 June Lubin telephoned Amy Fennell at Edwin Coe, instructing her to send another £100,000 to the Giloberg account via Bank Cantrade, "usual details". Fennell obliged and Lubin's package of goodies from BGN had grown to £600,000 in cash plus, of course, the shares. The crux of this particular lesson should, by now, be obvious even to the least financially astute reader. Take as much as you can out of the company while it is there. Tomorrow may be too late.

And where was Sir Jeremy Hanley while all this was going on? True, he did not become chairman of BGN until 2 March 2000, a couple of weeks after the first share transfers, but he was firmly in the chair from then on. Nor can he plead ignorance: he was briefed by Suzanne Martin, the BGN chief executive who first blew the whistle on Lubin's and Keene's financial shenanigans (and was promptly sacked). According to the minutes of a board meeting held on 31 January 2001, just before her dismissal, Sir Jeremy asked nervously: "Do you think [the] accounts will show fraud?"

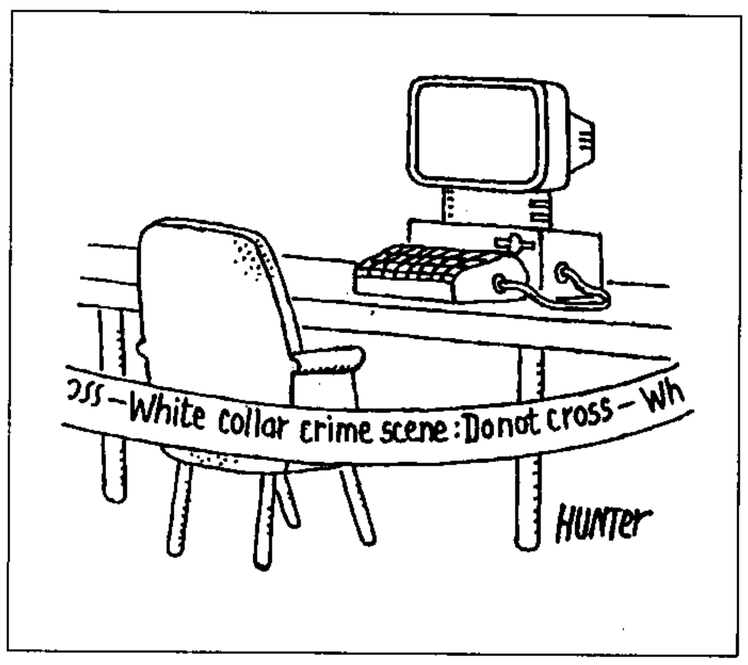
To which Suzanne Martin replied: "Yes."

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

NEWS that the wholesale shredding of Enron documents by its accountant Andersen included the destruction of evidence in the auditor's London office should come as no surprise given the significance of the European energy trading operations. Enron Europe was not just a microcosm of Enron Houston; it was often the proving ground for certain of the more esoteric financial techniques the ever accommodating Andersen honed, perfected and then approved.

It would also seem that Enron and Andersen in London played a significant role in some of the more contentious arrangements aimed at moving liabilities off balance sheet – such as the Chewco partnership (financed by Barclays) and the Mahonia transactions (run through Jersey). Andersen also helped flatter Enron earnings by not insisting on an immediate $440m provision for the North Sea "J Block" gas contracts and by accepting the spreading of profits from securitisation of the Teesside power station over two quarters, including one in which there was no profit to be taken.



Much if not most of the documentation regarding such deals would have been reviewed by Andersen in London. So it is no surprise that across the Atlantic Andersen should have been concerned about what evidence might exist in London once an investigation by the Securities & Exchange Commission (SEC) watchdog was launched. Of course an internal inquiry has found no evidence of wrongdoing or "inappropriate" document destruction in London, but then that is what internal inquiries are always supposed to do.

Much more significant will be the view taken not just by the SEC but now by the US justice department which has indicted Andersen for obstruction of justice over the destruction of Enron documents, identifying the London office as part of that criminal activity.

Enron Capital & Trade Resources (ECTR) was a crucial element in the ability of Enron to show ever rising profits. ECTR handled most of the derivatives trading which drove the Enron train. It played a key role in the "asset light" strategy dreamed up by Enron chief executive Jeffrey Skilling – the man who wasn't there.

Andersen's approach towards ECTR's trading profits was therefore crucial. This is indicated by a 1996 internal Enron document which details the lengths Enron went to ensure it could boost or smooth earnings from such a volatile activity as energy derivatives. The memo is headed "Implementation of fair value accounting for ECT's merchant banking activities". This reveals that energy trader Enron intended to redefine ECT as a merchant bank so it could switch to accounting for its energy investments using the fair value basis applied by venture capital organisations rather than simply historic cost.

The fair value approach is similar to the "mark to market" valuation used by Enron to value most of its energy investments where there was no accepted market valuation. Its advantage was that it enabled Enron to have greater scope to decide the value of its investments and so generate profits or disguise losses as it wished.

This beneficial switch was approved by Andersen in Houston, which also agreed that this would not affect the way in which these investments were presented in the Enron consolidated accounts. The auditors also agreed there was no need for any adjustment to past accounts. ECT was just then starting to come into its own and was soon a major factor in the Enron finances.

Similar understanding was shown by Andersen when it came to another Enron wrinkle in assessing the risk and liability associated with its sale of two virtual power stations to TXU. Under these 1996/7 deals TXU held options to sell gas to Enron in return for electricity/power. Enron was "short" of power and "long" of gas. If the "spread" between these two widened against Enron, it faced ever increasing losses over the life of the contract.

Yet Enron chose to assess the risk of getting prices wrong on these longterm contracts on the basis of the minimum "one-day horizon" thereby limiting the recognition of volatility that creates risk. But given the lack of liquidity in the energy market for such longterm contracts (because of the inability to predict prices more than 6 years ahead), this is described by one former Enron insider as "astonishing". A one-year horizon would be more realistic. But that would have increased the amount of potential volatility – one day is less potentially volatile than one year – and also increased the estimate of Enron's exposure substantially given the size and duration of these power contracts. "You are talking about formidable amounts of power and a fantastic scale of risk," says the former Enron executive.

But Enron's "one-day horizon" was accepted by Andersen. As a result Enron's capital adequacy was also calculated on this hopelessly inadequate amount. Once again this was also reliant on controversial mark to market valuations.

Not surprisingly the TXU contracts are now the likely subject of litigation between the Enron Europe administrators and TXU. What was shown as a potential £400m mark to market value or paper profit for Enron now seems to be well out of the money.

Just how scary the situation presented by the TXU contracts was is highlighted by an Enron internal review carried out in early 2000. One 15-year gas for power virtual power station deal was hedged by Enron through its ownership of the Sutton Bridge power station to which it could sell gas. This meant Enron could always supply power from its own resources. But the second 19-year contract was in effect an unhedged "naked option" as a result of Enron not getting permission to go ahead with the Isle of Grain power station. Despite these longterm risks, Enron in 1997 received £110m as an upfront payment thanks to a transaction to monetize the Sutton Bridge contract via a derivative deal with a special purpose vehicle called Eurocash 1 involving General Electric and the Industrial Bank of Japan. But by 2000 there was growing concern inside Enron because the proposed sale of the Sutton Bridge power station, to generate an instant profit, would leave both longterm TXU contracts as in effect "naked options" and ones which already appeared to be increasingly likely to be out of the money. Enron was increasingly exposed if power prices went up and gas prices went down.

At £354m TXU Europe was Enron's greatest concentration of counter-party risk at the end of 1999. Ironically Enron was concerned about TXU's capacity to pay. As it is Enron – facing ever bigger losses on the power for gas deals – claimed TXU was in breach of the agreements hours before the administrators were appointed. TXU responded by using the Enron collapse to declare the deal dead.

Just how much "profit" Enron has already booked from the TXU deals with the approval of Andersen is unclear. Less so is why the ever compliant Andersen agreed to risk assessments which so understated Enron's potential liabilities from the TXU contracts.

THOSE Enron executives who find themselves in court facing criminal charges can have no doubt that to be convicted will be to do some serious time.

American judges have no mercy when it comes to punishing guilty "suits" even if it is a first offence. Their view is much closer to "victims' justice" than that practised at the Old Bailey. Proof of this was given in a recent fraud case in California. Lance van Alstyne was jailed for 24 years for defrauding elderly investors of almost $11m in worthless oil and gas partnerships and laundering the proceeds. No investment fraud in Britain has ever been punished with a sentence of more than 10 years in prison.

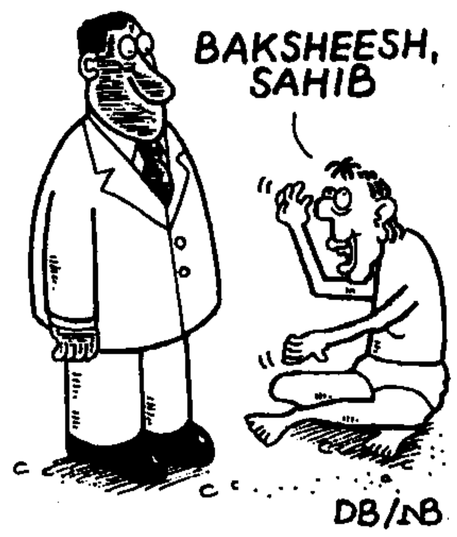
A SOMEWHAT tarnished Prince Naseem Hamed makes his return to the boxing ring this month after an absence of almost year. But

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE/RIGG

PEOPLE SAY I MAKE A PROFIT OUT OF EXPLOITING OTHERS...
ACCOUNTS
...BUT I JUST CAN'T SEE IT, MYSELF!
LOOK SIR JULIAN-
...IT'S THERE!
AH, YES— HMM... NOT BAD!

NEW OLD SAYINGS



Many a mittal makes a muckle

while the Sheffield poseur was recovering from the reality check handed out by Mexican Marco Antonio Barrera, his financial advisers have been kept busy fending off another potential opponent – the taxman.

The Inland Revenue has become interested in payments made for the TV rights to Hamed's past fights shown in Yemen – from where the Hamed family came. Hamed's fights are regularly broadcast to the Middle East by an Arab-owned satellite channel. Yemen is not an oil rich state, but the payments seem to have been enough to attract the possible attention of the Revenue.

Hamed is understood to have hired leading accountants KPMG and tax counsel to review his financial affairs. The result has been some expensive adjustments to the accounts of Naseem Hamed Enterprises which receives the income from all his UK fights – such as his comeback bout at Wembley – but not that paid overseas or for the Yemen rights. How the income from US fights, such as that with Barrera, is handled has never been clear other than that payments to offshore companies may be involved. As a UK resident all Hamed's worldwide income after expenses would be taxable here.

On advice from counsel the 1999 accounts for NHE saw turnover adjusted last year to show an extra amount earned of more than £1.3m. After deducting income relating to US fights, this resulted in an extra corporation tax bill of £240,000, making a tax total of £310,000. For 2000 the corporation tax bill rose to £610,000 from turnover of £4.3m. But then the Prince could afford it. He paid himself a salary of £1.5m.

However, the matter may not yet be closed. NHE auditors Landin Wilcock reported last August on the accounts to April 2000 on what they term a "fundamental uncertainty". "We have considered the adequacy of the disclosures made in the financial statements concerning the interpretation of certain contractual arrangements relating to income arising from the Yemen rights to the UK fights. This issue has not yet been agreed with the Inland Revenue."

'Slicker'

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EYE CROSSWORD 205

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 28 March 2002.

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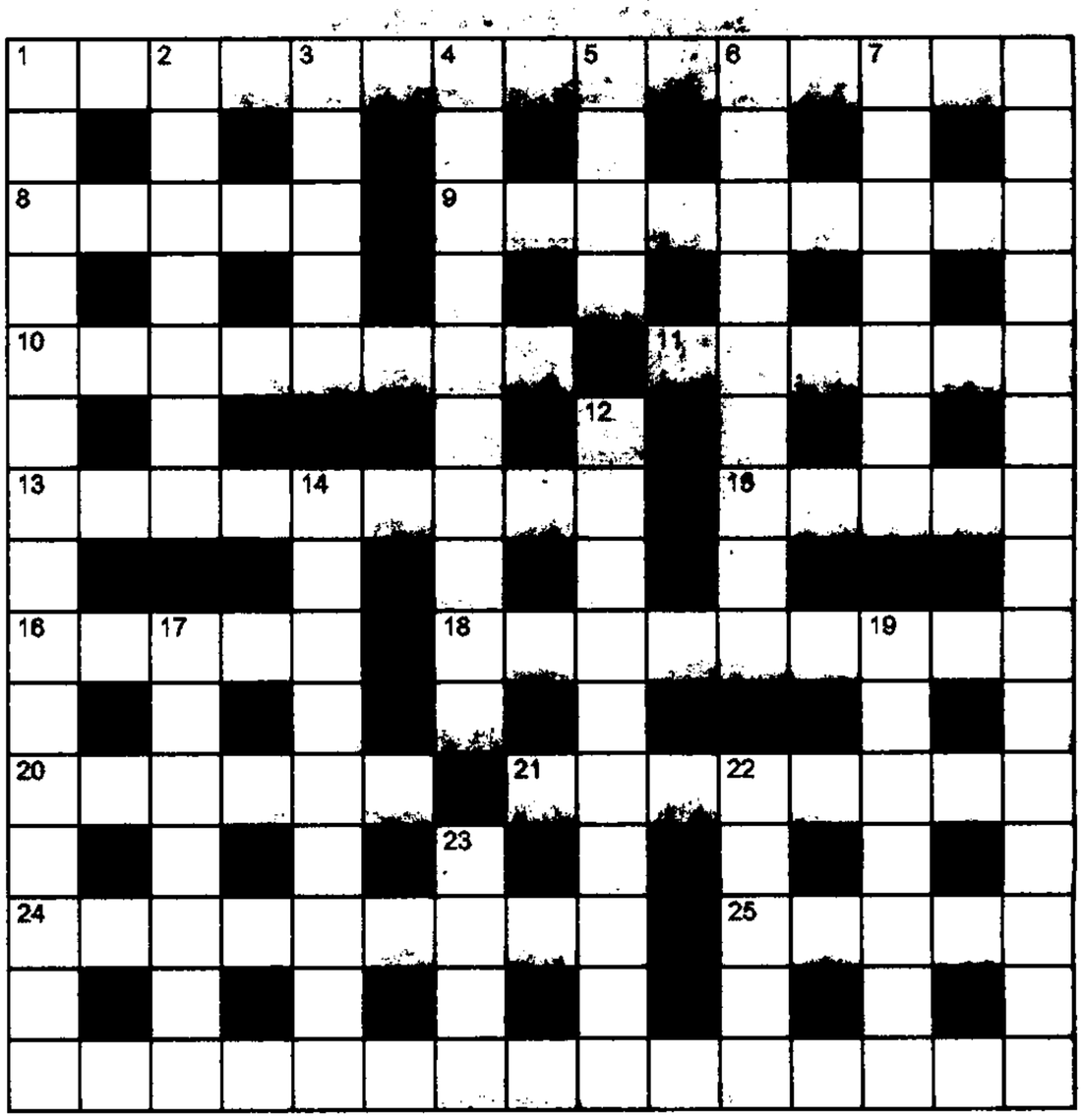

Starting with the top LH square and running clockwise around the perimeter of the grid is a poser, made up of the following 56 letters: AAAAAADDDEEEEEEEEFFGGHHHHIILLLLLMMNNNNNNOOOPPRRSSSSTTTWY (3,2,5,4,9,4,6,9,2,3,4,5). The answer to the poser may be found at 12 down.

ACROSS

1 (see preamble) (15)
8 Liberal opens gob, causing division (5)
9 Scrooge getting pissed with Bottom (5,4)
10 It has a purifying effect, tumbling Brenda — splendid habit! (8)
11 A bit filthy, *Iris*'s premiere, in colour (6)
13 Girl commonly left with Mick Jagger's painful hardening (9)
15 Blair's not finished with Livingstone, mark (5)
16 Old Roman town offering top grade sex? Very reverse (5)
18 Wanton Dora goes into bars and hustles (9)
20 Tired out gobbling Old Moore, to name one (6)
21 During bonk, name something that tops head almost — port (8)
24 So Tess, in cryptic crossword terms, is a wanker (6,3)
25 Like-to-get-in-the-sack set (5)

DOWN

2 Self-satisfied almost; headstrong, as Americans would have it (7)
3 Frequently lose an erection, going without head (5)
4 Malfunctioning of urethra's no proper time to be drinking in a pub (5,5)
5 Board shifts the sod (4)
6 Butcher takes prime cut of meat to pisspoor tutorial (9)
7 Scottish town gets TV series' wife in to give tongue (7)
12 Transporting 500 + 8/50 (screw you!) + 50 (10)
14 Get into a lather over Salome's TV series (4,5)
17 Nerd cherishes new 'Home Counties' outfit (4,3)
19 Have one at a pub on the continent and it could slur your speech (7)
22 Earl needs a bit of knob-lengthening (5)
23 Erect after firm stroke (4)

Crossword 204 winner: GABRIEL KEEN

Solution to Crossword 204

ACROSS: 1 Swing both ways 10 Up-tempo 11 Idi Amin 12 Ethos 13 Just fancy 14 Boob tube 16 Breeze 19 Bust-up 20 Dirty dog 23 All thumbs 25 Boris 26 Mafioso 27 Urethra 28 French kissing.

DOWN: 2 Watchdogs 3 Names 4 Blow jobs 5 Thirst 6 Wait for it 7 Yemen 8 Superb 9 Enzyme 15 Touchdown 17 Endorphin 18 Missouri 19 Brahms 21 Gasbag 22 Smooch 24 Lifer 25 Brews.

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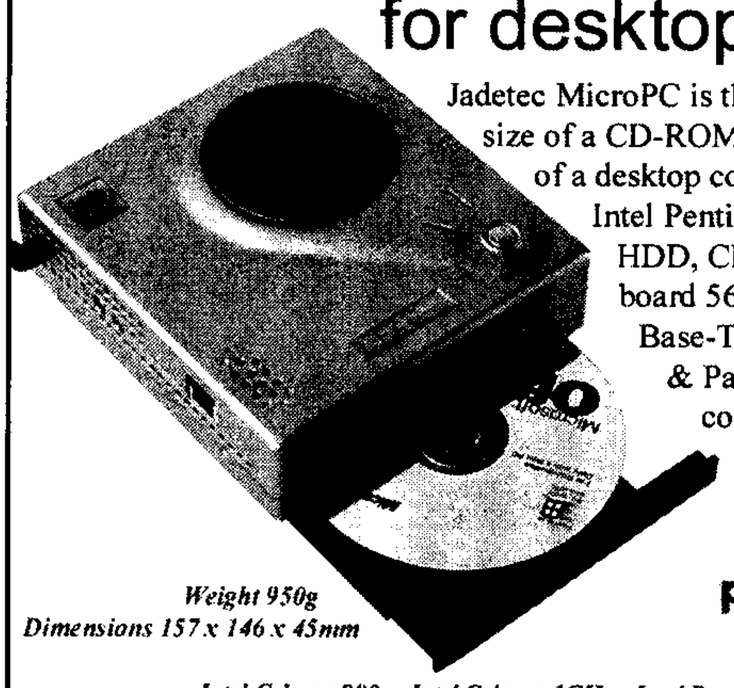

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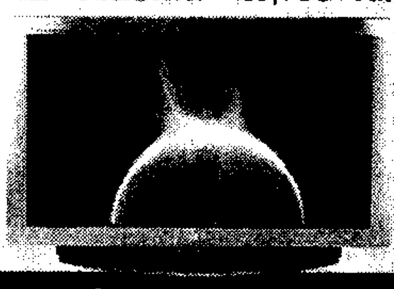

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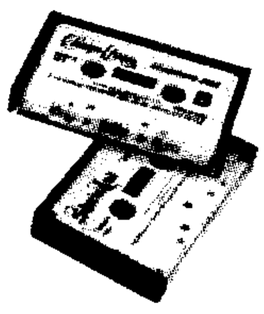

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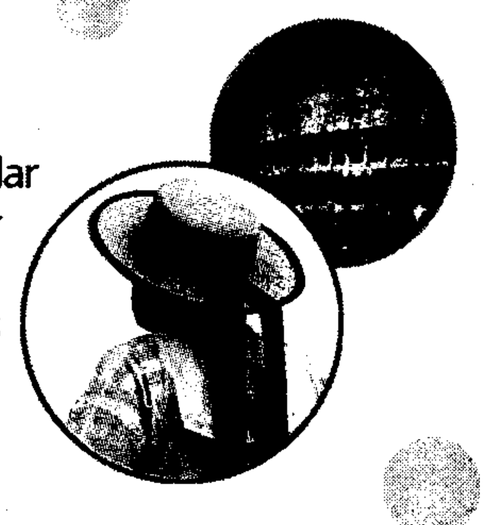

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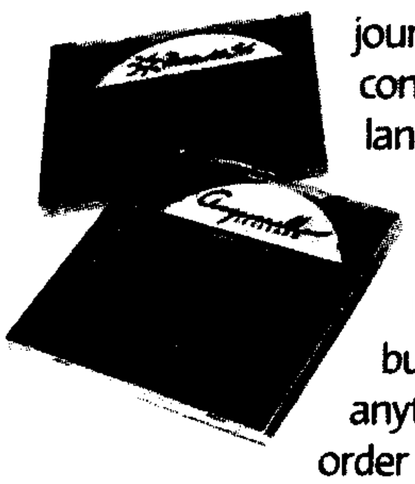

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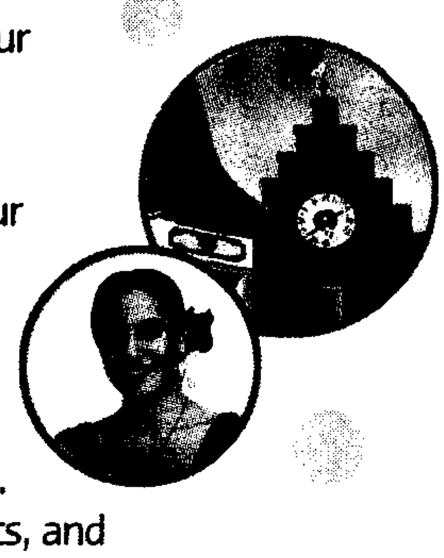

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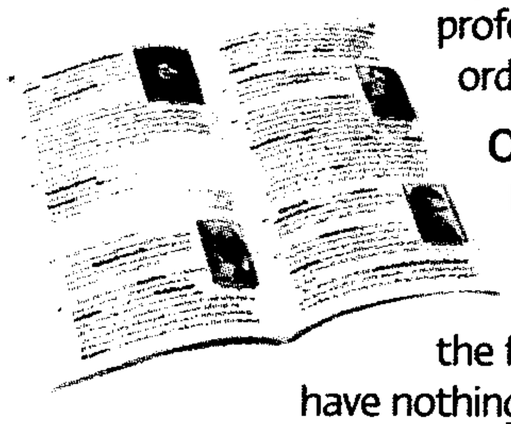

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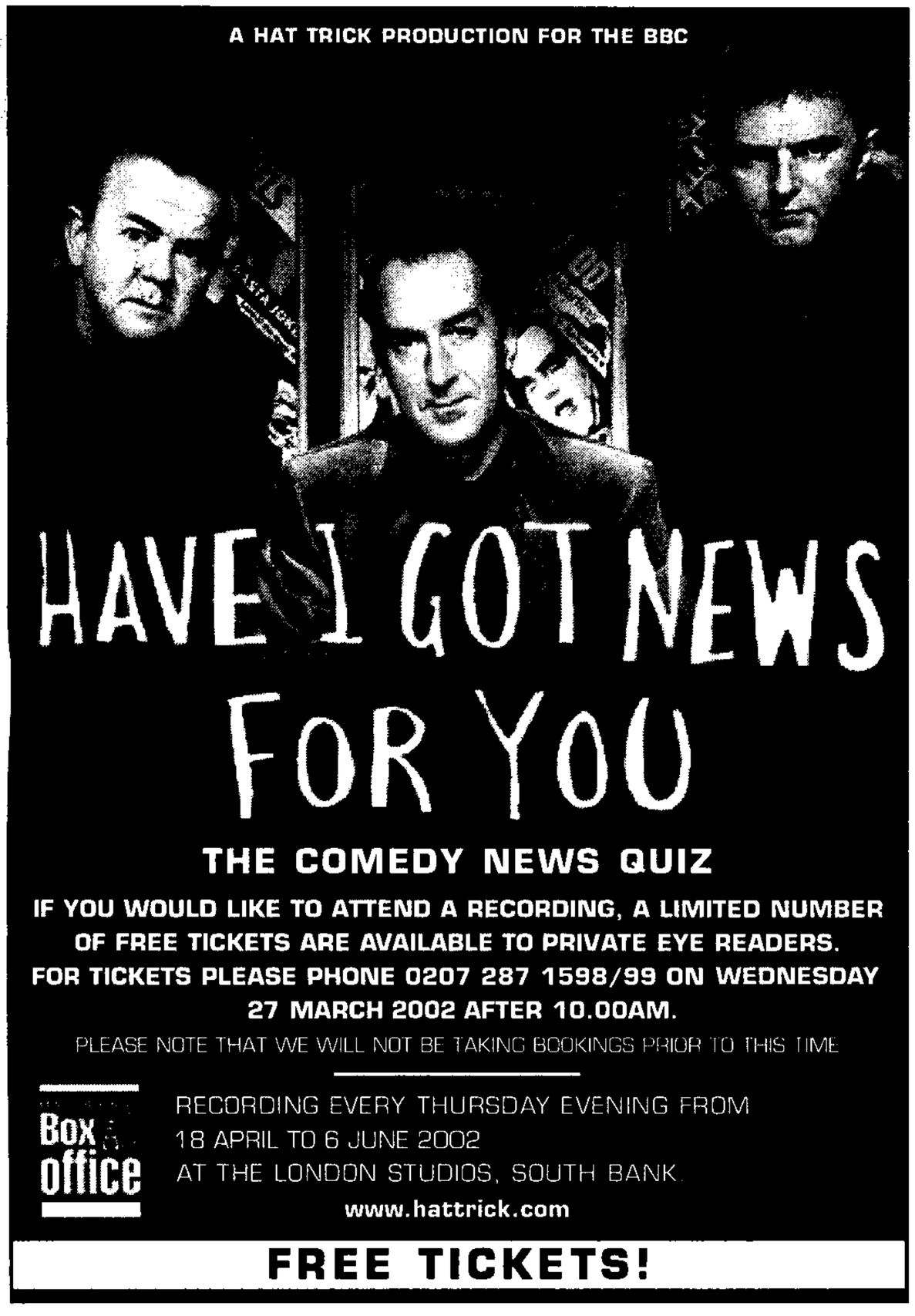
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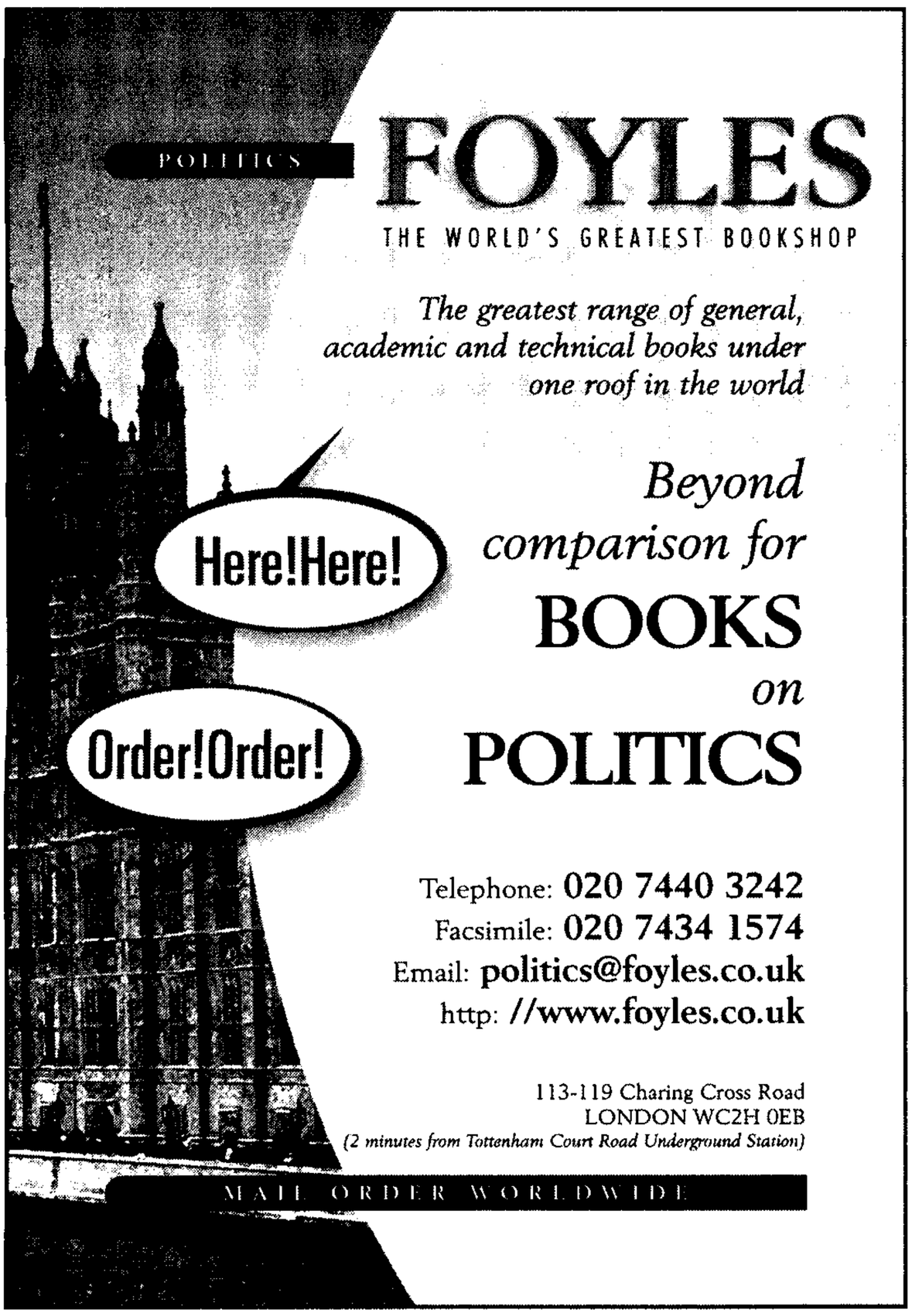

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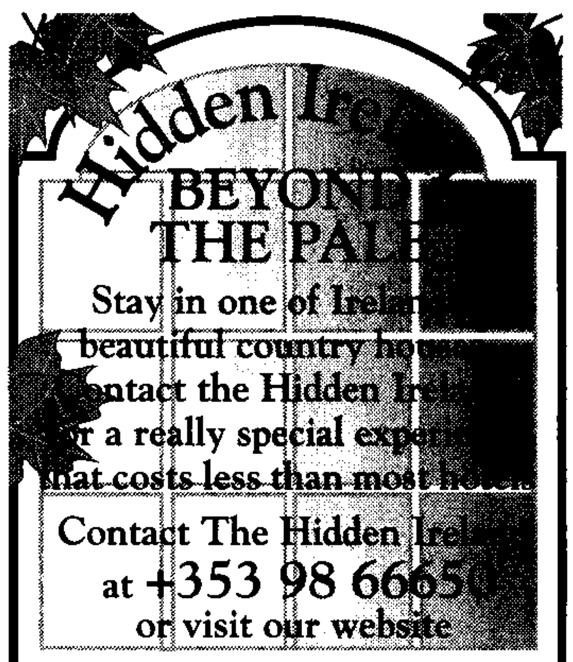

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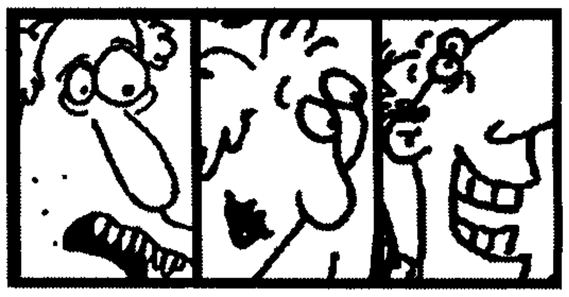

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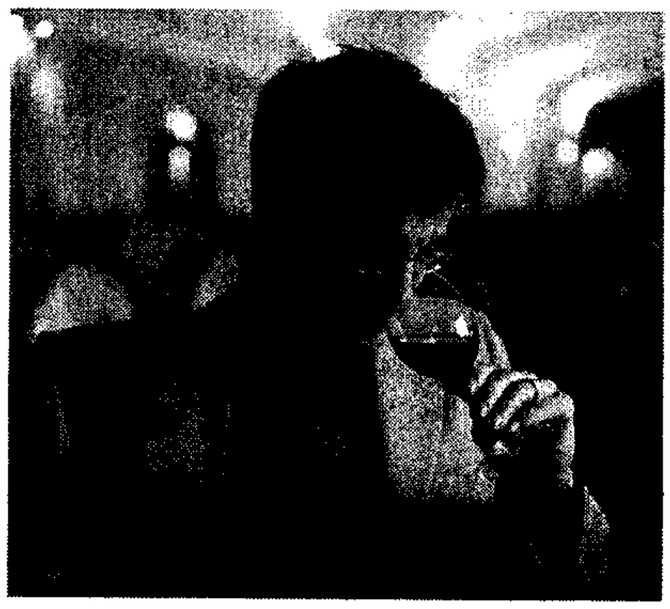

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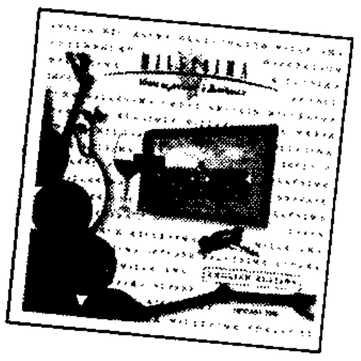

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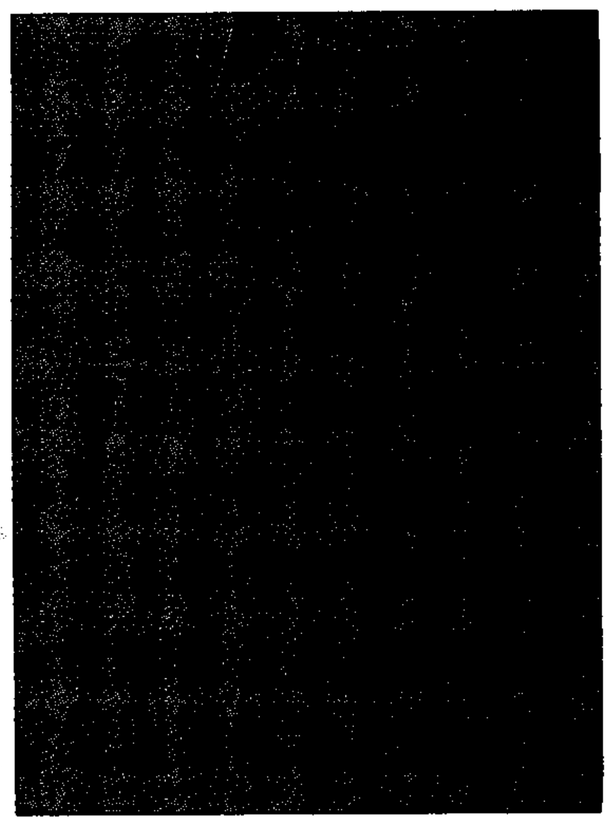

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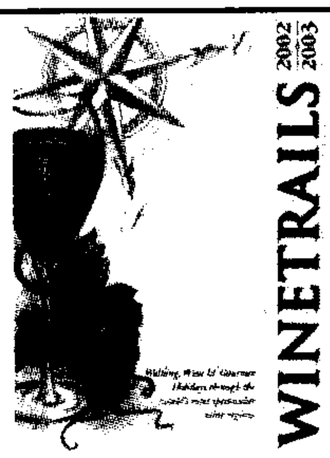

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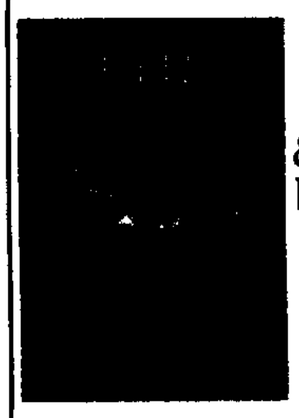

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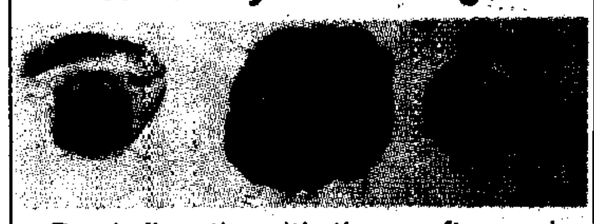

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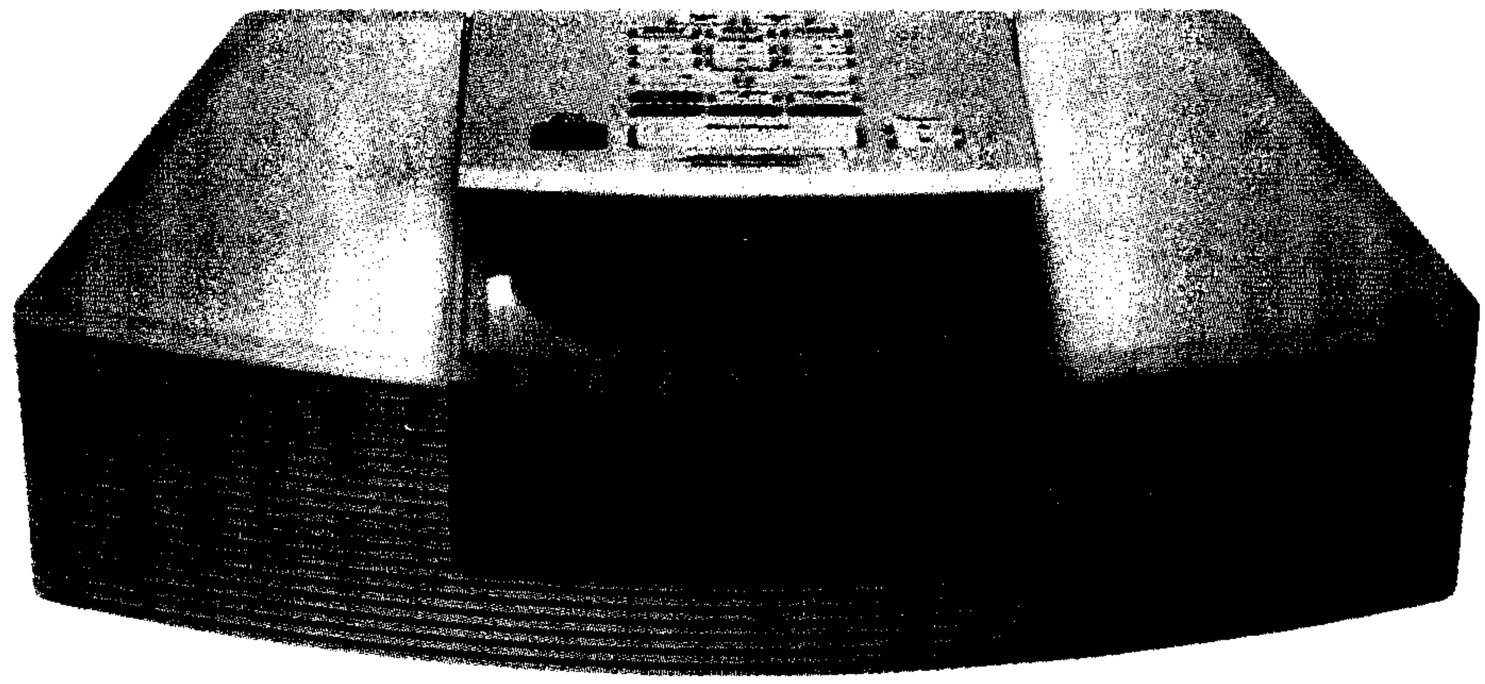

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